

**Creating and sustaining an “effective”
rural school: The critical triad –
leadership, curriculum, and community**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy at the

University of Otago

2012

Abstract

This thesis examines the professional practices of rural school principals in the province of Otago, New Zealand, to describe what it is about their practices that creates and maintains effective rural schools. The underlying question for this research was, The leadership and management of effective, small, rural schools appears to pose unique problems and issues from that in larger rural and urban schools. What makes that difference?

A mixed methods approach was taken, using a survey designed for the study and administered to 63 principals of rural schools in Otago. Observations of six purposively chosen principals representing a large rural school (with a role of 150 or above) and a small rural school (with a role of 60 or below) from each of the three areas of Otago: Coastal (East), South Otago, and Central Otago; and, interviews with the six principals who were observed. The survey was factor analysed and showed strong psychometric properties. It yielded background and demographic information regarding the sample, their perceptions regarding their ideals for their schools as compared to the actual situations in their schools, and their views on developing a local curriculum and the factors that made an effective rural school. The survey informed the following observation schedules and questions for the interviews, which were conducted with 6 principals chosen to represent a cross section of types of rural schools. Main findings from the study were that context mattered – small rural school leadership was shown to be different from that in large rural schools, and that for small rural schools, a local curriculum using the local community and environment for content was essential. The results are discussed in terms of the implications they have for the profession and the future training of rural educationalists, and how the results both relate to the literature, and extend the current knowledge base about rural schools.

Acknowledgements

Thank you first and foremost to my supervisors Prof. Lisa Smith and Dr Darrell Latham who have generously given their expert advice, support and time.

Thank you also to Fiona Stuart who generously gave a maximum effort to assist me in getting this research into a presentable form.

I would like to acknowledge the principals of primary schools in Otago New Zealand who made this research possible. Thank you for your support.

And finally I would like to dedicate this research to the small schools' principals in the NZ educational system. Your contribution to education in NZ should be acclaimed everywhere.

We who were born

We who were born
In Country places
Far from cities
And shifting faces,
We have a birthright
No man can sell,
And a secret joy
No man can tell.

For we are kindred
To lordly things;
The wild duck's flight
And the white owl's wings,
The pike and the salmon,
The bull and the horse,
The curlew's cry
And the smell of gors.

Pride of trees,
Swiftness of streams,
Magic of frost
Have shaped our dreams.
No baser vision
Their spirit fills
Who walk by right
On the naked hills.

Eiluned Lewis

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an initial introduction to the study. It examines four foundational elements of the study:

1. The purpose and the intersecting areas of the research;
2. The New Zealand educational context and its bearing on the study;
3. The New Zealand Curriculum Framework and development relevant to the study and
4. Introduction of the problem, the research questions and its aims, the gaps in the research and the significance of the study, its limitations and assumptions and introducing the researcher.

This chapter concludes with a summary of the ensuing chapters. The appendices to this thesis provide primary evidence to support some of the key statements made about the aspects of the study in the body of the text.

1.1 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the professional practices of rural school principals in the province of Otago, New Zealand, to describe what it is about their practices that creates and maintains effective rural schools.

1.2 The Intersecting Areas of Research

Creating and maintaining effective small and rural schools intersects with four main educational research areas. It involves examining research from both the rural and the small schools context. The study also investigated the effective professional practices

paradigm and effects of leadership with particular reference to recent New Zealand and Australian research, and finally it will involve research around using community as curriculum.

Leadership has always been a key organisational concept in terms of defining the management and administration of systems associated within institutions. In recent times leadership has been universally offered as a panacea for almost any social problem.

"Organizational effectiveness and leadership are inextricably interwoven" (Sheppard, 1996, p. 325). As such, leadership has generated an outpouring of writing and research about what the concept means, how it is practised, how it is recognised, and how best it may be attained or developed.

Even though leadership has always been a global field of study, the internationalisation of the study of leadership has contributed to the exponential growth of writing about leadership in the last two decades. We now know a great deal about effectiveness in an educational context. There is a voluminous and continually growing body of scholarship describing the nature and effects of educational leadership (Bush & Glover, 2003; Harris, 2005; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). A plethora of anecdotal and informal case evidence combined with empirical research findings suggests that, "Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools" (Beare, Caldwell & Millikan, 1989, p. 99).

This study seeks to examine whether effectiveness in rural and small schools is a function of interactions within the system (context), or a function of the different roles of leadership in this context. It may be that it is a combination of interrelationships that

facilitate the creation and maintenance of an effective rural school. It is generally understood that the judgement as to the effectiveness of small and rural schools depends not only on the abilities and leadership of the principal, but also on the relationship between the principal, the school students, their families, the BOT, and the wider community in which the school is located (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Ford & Prescott, 2002). Principals need to be contextually literate because context matters (Mulford, 2008). For very small and rural schools, successful leadership characteristics need to take into account the imbeddedness of the schools within their local community, and the concomitant communication skills required to build the relationships requisite for developing sustainable relationships.

In order to understand the local school culture and be in a position to implement change, rural principals are expected to have considerable experience both of regular classroom teaching, and of various positions of responsibility in schools (Clarke & Wildy, 2004). In addition, Herzog and Pittman (1995) observed, “For rural schools to be successful in combating their problems, they will have to capitalize on the community and family ties that are rated as so important by rural students” (p. 118). If the key determinant of future educational success is a focus on community as West-Burnham (2002) argued then using the community as curricula in a sympathetic, local curriculum becomes a crucial factor contributing to the effectiveness and sustainability of rural schools. Principals of schools in New Zealand currently have an unprecedented opportunity to provide leadership in creating their own communities unique curriculum.

It is these intersecting areas of leadership, curriculum and innovation in small communities, which provides the underlying basis for this study.

1.3 The Context of the Study

1.3.1 The New Zealand educational scene.

New Zealand's education system has evolved over time from the European traditions of its earliest settlers or immigrants, who were generally from the British Isles or European descent. The education system in New Zealand is in the main a state funded system, but parents, caregivers, and students have a number of schooling options. Integrated schools (generally schools which were formerly private schools but which have now joined and are governed within the state system. While teaching the New Zealand Curriculum integrated schools generally keep their own special character – usually a philosophical or religious belief as part of their school programme), Kura kaupapa Māori (schools where teaching is in the Māori language, Te Reo Māori, and is based on Māori culture and values), special schools for students with special education needs, designated character schools (which are allowed to develop their own set of aims, purposes and objectives to reflect their own particular values), and the Correspondence School (TCS) which generally provides distance learning across New Zealand for more than 18,000 students. Alongside the state system are a number of independent or private schools which are governed by their own independent boards but must meet certain standards in order to be registered. Private schools charge fees but also receive some subsidy funding from the government.

The complex education system involving the 2,548 New Zealand schools (as at July 2011 Statistics from Education Counts website.) has at its base a primary (elementary) school (2007 schools) attended from age five (compulsory at six) in which children

normally advance each year to the next class level. The junior school (equates with kindergarten or nursery levels in other systems) takes in the first two years through to the primary school of a further four years. Most primary pupils in urban areas then progress to a transition stage of intermediate schools at Year 7 and Year 8 before entering the secondary schooling two years later at Year 9. However, in a number of rural areas the situation is very different. Area schools, which followed on from the dissolution of district high schools in rural areas, are similar to a combined primary and secondary school where pupils begin at Year 1 and are retained to the end of their school career at age 16 or at Year 13. In rural areas where there is no local area school, primary schools retain their year 7 and 8 pupils. In rural areas where there is an area school, primary schools, other than integrated schools, are known as contributing schools, and retain pupils to Year 6 only. Area schools and secondary schools take pupils through to the end of compulsory schooling at age 16 or to Year 13.

Over 70% of New Zealand's primary schools are small schools with only two to five teachers. In the latest figures for Otago, 90 out of 126 schools have fewer than 160 pupils. Seventy of these schools are in rural areas (Information obtained from DCE database of schools 2011). In most of these schools the principal has a teaching responsibility for a proportion of the week as well as responsibility for school management. These leaders of schools are known as “teaching principals”.

1.3.2 The major reforms in education.

During the latter part of the 21st century, a combination of forces in the western world with new alliances of powerful groups attempted to redefine the purpose of

education, moving education's purpose away from a benefit to the individual to the production of a skilled workforce. Education became integrated into wider ideological commitments (Apple, 1993; Apple & Jungck, 1990; Olssen & Matthews, 1995; Peters, 1994). The shape of contemporary schooling in New Zealand derives from this change in thinking about education.

Simultaneously, the market-based reform movement with a managerial perspective redefined objectives in education - if only the education system would become more efficient and more productive the ills of society would be cured. As Thrupp & Willmott (2003) pointed out for the British education system, "The criteria of managerialism are palpable . . . efficiency, productivity and cost-effectiveness ('value for money' in Ofsted terminology)" (p. 26). In New Zealand this became interpreted as "value added" in terms of the Education Review Office (ERO), (an independent government department responsible for evaluating and reporting on education in schools, early childhood centres and other education organisations in New Zealand) reports. In large measure, these reforms have also meant deliberately constructing the mythology that somehow schools and teachers are the cause of economic failure (Smyth, 1989b).

The general public has been encouraged, not least in New Zealand by reports from the Education Review Office and by media reports, to mistakenly assume that shortfalls in student achievement result directly from poor teaching (Thrupp, 1998). In other words, "if only teachers would just teach, students would learn" (Lageman, 1991, p. 1) and, "if...prescribed forms of action (a return to the teaching of basic skills, teacher appraisal schemes, performance indicators, state wide testing...) are adopted, then schools can be

magically restored to their rightful role as servants of the economy” (Smyth, 1989b pp. 4).

What is important for this study has been the reports published annually by ERO, which have tended to negatively allude to the educational experiences of children in small schools. This disparagement of small school experience has continued to be highlighted over a number of years, not just in New Zealand but in America as well. While the balance has been readdressed somewhat in the last five years, at least in New Zealand, the continual highlighting of problems without the balance of reporting the successes contributed to erroneous assumptions by the general public as to the nature of education available in small schools, and affected a whole range of schools out of proportion to its occurrence. The National Monitoring Project (known locally as NEMP), which focused on sample testing over a range of schools including small rural schools, and which refuted these findings, continues to receive hardly a one-line space. The current climate of government instigated “standards-based” testing looks likely to reinvigorate the argument against small and rural schools.

In comparison to other school sectors, the educational reforms of the 1990s and the early part of the 21st century were to adversely affect teaching principals the most.

1.3.3 The beginning of educational reforms.

The fourth Labour government in New Zealand, came to power in 1984 in a climate of unrest featuring economic decline and fiscal instability. Radical changes occurred in the New Zealand economy as a result and gave rise to an era of “economic rationalism”. Economic rationalism was used to describe the dominance of the economy and economic processes over most areas of society. It involves the distancing of the role

of the government and its agencies, and an increase in the role of the market and market forces on commodities, of which education is one (Codd, 1997).

A general dissatisfaction with the education system already manifest prior to the snap election that brought the Labour Government to power resulted in the release of the policy document, *A Review of the Core Curriculum for School* in 1984 by the then Minister of Education, Merv Wellington. The release of this document and the unacceptably short timeframe for submissions and comment raised a storm of controversy over its supposedly restrictive and anti democratic implications (Codd, 1990). As an election issue, the Labour government had pledged to reopen discussions and a Committee to Review the Curriculum for Schools was set up in November 1984.

After nearly two years of consultation and debate the report, entitled *The Curriculum Review*, was released to a generally favourable response by education groups in 1987. One of the major implications from the review of curriculum was its basis as “the learner as being at the heart of all educational planning” (Le Metais, 2002, p. 8) and “the strong emphasis on school and community based planning of the curriculum within guidelines approved by the state” (Codd, 1990, p. 194). A draft document was published in 1988 as the *National Curriculum Statement: Discussion Document*. However, the discussion became sidelined by the reforms in administration of education following the *Picot Report* (1986) and *Tomorrow’s Schools* (1988) and a change in government in 1990.

1.3.4 The impact of the reforms on principalship.

The Picot Report (Department of Education, 1988) and the government’s response, *Tomorrows Schools* (Department of Education, 1988) were the most important policy reports in reshaping administration for schools and the education system in general (Codd, 1990; Olssen & Matthews, 1997) and were to have a major effect on school

principalship. In 1989, boards of trustees replaced school committees and regional education boards which had formerly managed schools. The most immediate changes tended to be a central emphasis on parent members rather than wider community, and greater responsibility including the appointment of all school staff, the development of school charters and policies, management of the institutions property, and the school budget to operate within the centrally funded operations grant. Effectively this removed the Minister of Education from the line of fire. However the changes in responsibilities were to have widespread implications, particularly for Principals and even more so in rural schools. Primary school BOTs elected every three years, consisted of five parents, elected only by other (current) parents at the school, the principal, and a staff representative (usually a teacher). State-integrated schools also had proprietor's representatives. Boards could co-opt members to enhance community representation, or bring in people with useful skills. The Education Amendment Act 1992 allowed non-parents to be nominated for election, but few non-parents had joined boards of trustees as elected rather than co-opted or appointed trustees (Wylie, 1999). From the beginning, Ministry of Education-funded campaigns, through a contract with New Zealand School Trustees Association (STA), were run ahead of nomination time to encourage a wide range of parents to put themselves forward, and to ensure that all schools had sufficient trustees on their boards. Initially great interest was shown in 1989 with almost every school with more nominations than places. Of these 44 % were women. However by 1998 this membership of women had increased to 52 % of trustees. By 1998, 6 % of schools had fewer nominations than places and a further 25 % has the same number of nominations as places, indicating less interest in the role since 1989 (Wylie 1999). Small

rural schools were disadvantaged by a smaller pool of possible applicants with less professional qualifications. This meant that they did not have, as large schools did, the use of services from lawyers, accountants and property managers, without having to pay and contract for these services. Principals of smaller schools found that they were expected to provide the expertise to train their local boards, adding to an already intensified workload.

The devolution of administrative responsibility was closely followed by curriculum, assessment and accountability reforms driven from the centre (Levin, 2001). The impact of the reforms was to markedly increase the workload of both principals and teachers. Principals were reported as working 60 – 65 plus hours weekly and were increasingly reporting high stress levels (Wylie, 1999). For rural schools, the instigation of parental choice in 1991 by government legislation, which effectively led to competition amongst schools for pupils thus affecting their funding, and the implications from the educational reforms in transforming the role of the principal was compounded by an accompanying thrust to “rationalise” educational resources. What this basically meant was closing or amalgamating “non-viable” small rural schools and redirecting the “freed” resources to new sites with resource-support for the restructuring process (Education Development Initiative, 1991, p. 6). The Education Development Initiative (EDI) provided guidelines and increasing pressure for schools to conform, culminating in an ERO report in June 1992 indicating 40% of rural schools might no longer be viable. Stress levels of small rural school principals increased markedly. However, rural lobby groups including Federated Farmers mobilised to provide support for rural schools and exerted enough pressure that by November 1993, faced with a large drop in majority, the

then National Government placed the policy on the backburner (Butterworth & Butterworth, 1998). The progressive increase in workload for principals both through the implementation of new curriculum and in having to “justify” the viability of their schools has had major repercussion in ensuing decades, affecting the number of principal retirements and the lack of teachers putting themselves forward for principal appointment (Wiley, 1999).

The EDI policy however, remained and in the late 1990s, as a result of continuing demographic changes and rural decline, led to a series of “area reviews” which have continued to occur throughout New Zealand. In recent years these have expanded to include urban areas as well. The impact has been that rural schools feel threatened even today, with concomitant levels of high stress in times of roll decrease and negativity from possible applicants for vacant positions.

Support for principals in the form of School Administrative Support Cluster (SASC) was initiated in 1997 with the idea of reducing workload for principals by forming local co-operative administrative arrangements between clusters of small schools. At the same time, increased release time was granted to all school principals based on roll size to assist with administrative duties. Both of these initiatives were to impact positively for small schools and grew the seeds of a cluster support system which was to include support in areas other than administration. For the smaller schools it provided a means of employing extra staff to share the load.

While the reforms brought some freedom in the ability of schools to choose their own staff, equipment and materials within the limits of their budgets, it also brought

constraints in the form of national curricula, and a tighter system of monitoring through ERO. The curtailment of support services for Principals, previously available through former education boards, and the institution of contestable services instead, was a major disadvantage in rural areas. Advisory staff were initially available through the advisory services within former teachers' colleges, but these were continually curtailed through funding cuts as these colleges became colleges of education, or in a more recent development, Schools of Education through amalgamation with existing universities. This state of affairs of minimal support for principals was to last until the emerging years of the new century.

A change of government at the end of 1999 led to the instigation of further support systems for principals in the form of cluster developments, especially for small and rural schools and a new professional initiation programme for first time principals in 2002.

1.4 The New Zealand Curriculum Framework – A Brief Overview

Following a major public consultation on the curriculum in the mid 1980s (the Curriculum Review), work began on an overall framework for a revised school curriculum. However, the reform of administration in 1989 following the publication of *Administering for Excellence* (1988) and *Tomorrow's Schools* (1988), and two years later a change of government to National, effectively sidelined the development of curriculum reform until the publication of *The National Curriculum: A Discussion Document* in 1991 and finally *The New Zealand Curriculum Framework* in 1993. The introduction of these documents created enormous controversy and criticism from within the education field whose expertise and knowledge had been ignored.

From 1992, new National Curriculum Statements (Ministry of Education, 1991) were progressively introduced and, for the first time in New Zealand's educational history, curriculum documents specifying content and progression were produced divorced from the teaching profession.

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (NZCF) (Ministry of Education, 1993) produced curriculum statements for each of the seven essential learning areas in draft form for consultation and trialling, before being published in final form and gazetted for mandatory implementation in years 1 to 10. The time frame between draft document and final document and mandatory implementation became progressively shorter. From the first curriculum statement on Mathematics in 1992, new Curriculum Statements were developed for science, English, technology and social studies until a halt was called in 1996 after overwhelming concern was expressed about the speed of change, the expected rate of progression through to implementation of the new curriculum, and the concomitant proliferation of workload, particularly in the area of assessment. Research reports by Wylie (1997; 1999) and Renwick and Gray (1995) among others produced by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) and Sullivan (1997) showed the increasing growth of concern within the educational field. The speed of change was to have an enormous impact on all teaching staff, but more so for principals and especially for those in small and rural schools where there was not the number of staff to take over responsibility for different areas.

The NZCF (1993) was recognised as the major policy document which underpinned the New Zealand curriculum for all schools. This curriculum was initially expressed as seven essential learning areas, eight groupings of essential skills and a number of attitudes and values which "sets out national directions for schooling" (Ministry of Education, 1993, p.3). The essential learning areas were "broad,

recognisable categories of knowledge and understanding” and included Language and Languages, Mathematics, Science, Technology, Social Sciences, The Arts and Health and Physical Well-being (NZCF, p. 21). Eight groupings of essential skills were specified to be developed by all students across the whole curriculum throughout the years of schooling.

Progression in each learning area was divided by a number of levels (eight), with each level correspondent to two years of schooling. In a major change of direction from earlier curricula documents, achievement objectives (AO’s) were set at each level to be attained over a two-year period. These achievement objectives were then translated into specific learning outcomes (SLO’s), against which a student’s progress was measured. A lack of specific directives meant that for many schools these learning outcomes were taken as the curriculum requirements (Le Metais, 2002; Wylie 1999).

Important for small and rural schools were the responsibilities given to boards of trustees for curriculum with the introduction of school charters and the requirement under the National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) for BOTs to provide a “balanced” curriculum. Initially this “balance” was taken to mean teaching all of the essential learning areas, and schools were often berated by ERO for not having a balanced curriculum by neglecting particular areas, as, for example, Te Reo (Māori language) or music. However, new guidelines for the NAGs, which took effect in July 2000, stipulated a priority for achievement in literacy and numeracy at least in Year 1 through 4. This new focus on the “basics” meant an easing of the pressure on some of the other curriculum areas and a slight lessening of the intensification of workload for both teachers and principals. The responsibility for managing curriculum has however remained at the principal’s door, and in turn this has added to the widespread increase in workloads impacting especially on small and rural schools where the Principal is generally the sole

curriculum leader. The interrelationship of the principal with the curriculum was postulated to be crucial in small and rural schools (Beckner, 1996; Budge, 2006; T. Collins, 2001; Haas and Nachtigal, 1998; Howley, Theobald and Howley, 2005; Sigsworth & Solstad, 2001; Vogel, 2006).

The NZCS published prior to the 2004 investigation identified knowledge and skills but did not prescribe content. It was up to schools and teachers to have developed suitable learning experiences that would enable students to achieve the achievement objectives (Le Metais, 2002).

1.4.1 Biculturalism.

The most dominant feature of the New Zealand curriculum – from the outsider’s perspective – is the strong emphasis on recognising and protecting New Zealand’s bicultural heritage and the features unique to New Zealand. The curriculum stresses the principles, offers parallel curriculum documents (English-language and *te reo Māori* versions), prescribes “essential learnings” about New Zealand society and the Treaty of Waitangi (in Social Studies), and includes specific examples of Māori culture and heritage in the other learning areas. A corollary of this approach is the relative weakening of the commitment to recognising and drawing on the culture and traditions of the other groups in New Zealand’s multi-cultural society (Le Metais, 2002).

A partnership was historically established with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between the indigenous Māori inhabitants of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the British Crown in 1840. The Treaty guaranteed Māori the rights of sovereignty, *tino rangatiratanga*, in exchange for allowing British governance, *kawanatanga*. Interpretations of these rights and the document itself have been in dispute ever since.

However, over the last 20 years a strong and clearly articulated Māori voice successfully made clear arguments for the bicultural partnership of New Zealand despite the fact that New Zealand is an emerging multiethnic Pacific nation (Sullivan, 1995).

Since 1989 the Treaty of Waitangi has been specifically recognised in all educational policies, which are legislated to recognise the bicultural nature of NZ and the acknowledgement of the special place and significance of Māori in all educational considerations. This was clearly re-established in the new curriculum documents after an initial attempt to remove the bicultural emphasis in the NZC draft of 2006 met strong opposition.

Growing dissatisfaction with the relevance of many of the Achievement Objectives in the essential learning areas led to a curriculum stocktake undertaken in 2002 by the National Foundation for Educational Research for the Ministry of Education. Joanna Le Metais, an internationally recognised curriculum review researcher, undertook the review. A major review of the curriculum followed in 2004 under the umbrella of “The Curriculum Project.”

1.4.2 The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)

What was interesting about the new review of the curriculum was the opportunity for teachers and others in the field to have had their input recognised through consultation, a factor that had been missing over the past 15 years of reform. The M.O.E. called this a “participatory process” involving thousands of New Zealanders, over 10,000 questionnaires and submissions, two international critiques from the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia and ongoing consultation during drafting (Ministry of Education, 2008, item 32632). Certainly the intent and process were different from the

NZCF in 1992. After submissions were taken into account and collated the implementation timeline was extended by a year to 2010.

Several other new changes have been made in the NZC that differentiate it from the NZCF. Most important for this study is the inclusion of a section of designing of curriculum and on pedagogy. A more detailed description of the NZC is contained in the Literature Review.

Goals of the NZC project were four fold:

1. To clarify and refine curriculum outcomes;
2. To focus on quality teaching;
3. To strengthen school ownership of the curriculum;
4. To support communication and strengthen partnerships with parents and community (Ministry of Education, 2005).

The instigation of the new curriculum, and the deliberately generated prospect for each school to investigate, implement and take ownership of their own “unique” curriculum created a window of opportunity, especially for rural schools. The establishment of a local curriculum it was felt, could lead to the strengthening of partnerships as outlined in the fourth goal of the NZC project and further promote the sustainability of both school and community.

The interrelationships of leadership, curriculum and community thus proposed formed a focus for this research.

1.5 Statement of the Problem

The fundamental argument to be addressed in the research will be:

Does the leadership and management of effective, small and rural schools pose unique problems and issues? What makes small schools different?

1.6 Research Questions

1. To what extent is effectiveness in small/rural schools a function of interactions within the system (context), that is, the interrelated dimensions of the principal and their leadership, the school and its adopted curriculum, and the context of the wider community?
2. What are the professional practices identified as being effective by rural primary principals in Otago?
3. What professional practices are recognised by rural principals as being most effective for developing partnerships with their communities? How are these put into effect?
4. What professional practices and processes have successful rural principals found to be most effective for implementing a “local” curriculum? What has been the effect of implementing just such a curriculum?

1.7 Research Aims

- To investigate and identify the professional practices of effective principals in small/rural schools in Otago, New Zealand;
- To draw attention to the complexity and richness of teaching principals' work;

- To provide an explicit depiction of effective small school leadership which will inform the preparation, selection and professional development of principals in small schools;
- To document alternative pathways to designing and implementing school curriculum;
- To explore the interrelationships of principal, curriculum and community in effective small/rural schools.

1.7.1 Location of the study

This study focussed on the professional practices of rural principals in state primary schools of the Otago province in New Zealand. It involved first, a survey of all principals in rural state primary schools in the Otago region and second, an intensive investigation through observation and interviews of purposively chosen six rural principals who had been identified by the Education Review Office and peer colleagues as being effective leaders.

The geographic location of the six rural schools, which will form part of the intensive investigation, has been chosen to reflect the widest possible spread of rural schools over the Otago region. In addition, the six schools have been further categorised as being a large school and a small school from each area.

1.8 Gaps In The Research And The Importance Of The Research Study

The study is important for a number of pertinent reasons. The study:

- Is a rural educational context;
- Examines and identifies practices of effective small school/rural principals; and
- Investigates the implementation of a local school curriculum and its impact.

1.8.1 A rural educational context.

Rural researchers have argued for decades for an increase in research into all matters rural. In 2003 at the annual American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference attended by thousands, of over 7,000 research papers presented over five days, 16 papers in total addressed rural education. An article published by the Rural School and Community Trust called it “A Microscopic drop in the research bucket: The Dismal state of rural research” (Beeson & Strange, 2003). Demographics alone, they postulated, should determine an increase in rural research. More than one-fifth of students in public education in America attend rural schools and one third attend school in rural areas or small towns. Similar figures are available for New Zealand, yet like the United States, research in rural education is minimal. This study is an attempt to redress the balance.

The consolidation of schools and school districts is an ongoing issue from the early 1990’s in both rural America and rural New Zealand. Despite the fact that, “research evidence supporting this widely implemented and failed policy in rural areas . . . is virtually non-existent” (Rural Policy Matters, 2006) consolidation continues. The driving force to close a number of small, mainly rural schools in ensuing years from the early 90s has essentially stripped small communities of their last remaining institution. Research such as this study is vital to creating an understanding of the essential nature of

small/rural schools. Such an understanding would prevent the ongoing decimation of rural communities through the loss of their schools. In the USA, Jimerson (2006) found this ongoing battle to close smaller schools both unnecessary and irrational:

Small schools are intrinsically disposed to offer educational and social advantages for children. To expend energy on closing these schools diverts energy and focus from strengthening them, and worse wrenches community-centered schools from their communities and children from the schools that will have the most likelihood of meeting their needs. (p. 17)

Howley, Theobald and Howley (2005) have argued that the challenging work that most needs doing in rural research is in “providing description, establishing systematic influences and providing explanations” to bring forward the “rural meaningfulness that is essential to rural education research” (p. 1). Doing so they believe, will lessen the wide gulf that exists between the lifeworld of the rural context and usual forms of academic engagement, and help to compensate for the trivialisation and obscuration of the rural connection by forces such as the mass media and corporate administration (Howley et. al., 2005).

I believe that this study will contribute significantly to that description and explanation of what is meant by rural education, and to an understanding of the vital role of rural schools in re-energising their communities. It is unique in that it will be carried out in a range of rural schools of varying sizes and communities within a single region of New Zealand. The research will be carried out using mixed methods which will include

both empirical data (from observations) and analytical data (from surveys and interviews).

“Attention is welcome. Rural America has gone unnoticed for too long, its people are real, their problems significant, their prospects worthy” (Beeson & Strange, 2003, p. 3). “America” could be substituted with “New Zealand”. Surely this is a challenge that must be met. This research will go some way to meeting the challenge.

1.8.2 Effective practices of rural school principals.

Mendez-Morse (1992) avowed, “one of the major findings of the effective schools research was the identification of instructional leadership as a significant aspect of effective schools” (p. 17). This is significant for this study because principals of small and rural schools in New Zealand are generally teaching principals. In the literature review, a number of researchers have pointed out the need for a research agenda that investigates small school leadership, Southworth (1999, 2002) being a prime example. There has been relatively little research undertaken on leadership of small schools and even less in rural schools (Clarke, 2002; Dunning, 1993; Wilson, 2007). Western education systems now view leadership, and leadership practices as key issues both to resource and to nurture. If this is so, the number of small schools in New Zealand, in rural Australia, and in Scotland make this an important area of research to inform existing and future aspiring leaders as to what practices are effective in these contexts. This study is an attempt at rectifying the gap in research on leadership and leadership practices in small schools.

1.8.3 Community as Curriculum

Howley (2003) found that, “literature pertaining to rural school curriculum is sparse” (p.14). Recent research by Budge (2006) concluded, “The separation of schooling from the context most known to students—their places and communities—has detrimental effects on the individual and the common good” (p. 8). The power that place-based pedagogies hold for rural students and rural communities is becoming more widely known and accepted (Gruenewald, 2003b; Smith, 2002; Sobel, 2005; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995). This research explores whether using the community as curricula in a sympathetic, local curriculum is a crucial factor contributing to the effectiveness and the sustainability of rural/small schools, and was undertaken at a time when the input of parents and communities to developing just such curricula is not just sanctioned but warranted by new developments in the New Zealand Curriculum. Because the study involves investigating how rural principals go about designing and implementing their own “local” curriculum and how this affects their practices and the social capital of their communities, it will provide valuable data not just for the New Zealand scene, but the professional scene internationally as education systems in the western world approach these issues.

1.8.4 Benefits to the participants and participating schools.

Benefits to participating principals and schools will be to:

- Provide an opportunity for participants to share and articulate their personal beliefs and to examine their personal professional practices with regard to leadership, developing community relationships, and curriculum implementation;

- Involve participants in both data gathering and data analysis to further inform their practice and
- Create an opportunity for participants to network and share with a wider community of colleagues i.e. the region rather than the local cluster.

1.9 Expected Contribution to Knowledge

- There are a number of likely outcomes which will provide a contribution to the knowledge of the teaching profession, particularly for the benefit of small, rural principals. These outcomes will include:
- Informing the profession of the effective practices of small and /or rural principals;
- Providing a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of principals' work that also acknowledges the significance of context;
- Drawing attention to the complexity and richness of small school principalship and the need for longitudinal research in this area;
- Informing the practice of small and rural school principals with regard to the development and implementation of community based curriculum and;
- Providing details of alternative pathways and processes to designing and implementing local curriculum for all schools.

1.9.1 Limitations and assumptions in the proposed research.

Findings from the research will be limited to the extent that the research was conducted in one bounded area, that is, the province of Otago in New Zealand. New

Zealand is a very small country, and has concomitantly very small schools by international standards. However, there are a number of other countries, for example, Scotland, Australia, and parts of the USA, which have isolated areas with schools of a similar size.

A further limitation will be that the researcher was also the data gatherer and this may lead to researcher bias. An additional limitation of this research pertains to the use of factor analysis. Any factor analysis is dependent upon the data collected and subsequent interpretation of the results. Other interpretations may be possible.

A number of assumptions underpin the research. These are:

- teaching principals work is important, but complex;
- successful leadership in rural schools may involve a number of interrelated dimensions and a range of professional practices;
- successful leadership practices can be identified;
- successful leadership in rural communities takes commitment, dedication, a sympathetic orientation to rurality, and above all, time;
- sustainable leadership and curriculum involves schools, families and community taking responsibility and working together;
- rural/small schools are a vital component of sustainable communities; and
- rural research is important.

1.10 The Researcher

What is of importance for the purposes of this study is my alliance with rural schools and rural school leadership. I have spent most of my 30 plus year teaching career in small schools, and for the past 19 years I have been a principal of very small (one-room) rural schools. My background prior to teaching also favoured rural connections to the extent that I had not lived in an urban area continuously for more than two or three years at a time.

I became a union representative in the New Zealand teachers' union (New Zealand Educational Institute, [NZEI] Te Riu Roa) over 17 years ago as a rural representative on various area and district councils, primarily because of my interest in rural education and rural areas. I felt that rurality was not taken into consideration when either national policy was being developed by government, or when union policy was being developed by the union's national executive committee. Many of the policies from both organisations were detrimental to small and rural schools. I believed that the issues of rural schools needed a voice, and that by becoming active in both the teachers' union and in small schools cluster groups was a way of ensuring that a rural voice would be heard.

Tomorrow's schools (1988) heralded not only a new era but also new ways for the parents and community to become involved in the school and to make effective changes in how the school operated. At the time of my first principal appointment, it was the very early stages of Tomorrow's Schools. At that time there was an alliance of parents, primarily in the role of the rural equivalent of business leaders, irrespective of their role as parents, who were members of the BOT. This was symptomatic of other boards in the

country. It was an alliance looked for in the initial boards, and emphasised by the underpinning ideology of the new right. Even today, in many school areas (not just rural), this prejudice towards business acumen exists. This leads to an assumption that it is better for a professional-type person to be a BOT member, rather than others who could contribute so much more to the common sense approach. The consequences have been, just as in the country as a whole, a business orientation to education. This market orientation was deliberately fostered by the government of the time, who had adopted its strictures for its own purposes and was indicative of Western world governments coming into the 90s. However, when the criterion is economic the solutions tend also to be economic - this is how the market economy orientation works.

The influence of a business orientation favoured by the BOTs in my first appointment was to affect relations both inside and outside the school, and I believed it had an unwarranted influence on decisions.

My second appointment to a rural principalship followed after 12 years. The contexts were very different. The initial appointment was in a relatively wealthy rural area with a decile 10 (See glossary for an explanation of deciles) school followed by an appointment to a poorer coastal area with a decile rating of 3. The latter school had a prevailing history of conflict and flight from the school (for a number of reasons) to other neighbouring schools. Both schools at the time of my appointment had had several discretionary reviews undertaken by ERO. These reviews are generally a six month follow up to an initial review of the school and are issued when there are major problems of one sort or another. They often contain recommendations which must be implemented over a certain time-frame and if they are not implemented satisfactorily a second

discretionary review is carried out. However both schools, with the implementation of a localised curriculum, hard work, and a closer community relationships deliberately engendered, grew to be recognised as effective schools.

This experience, alongside my continuing practice of teaching in a small but special school, allowed me a privileged position to both gather and interrogate the data.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Rural researchers have known for a long time that there is a distinct lack of research about the rural context. “The lack of research attention to rural perspectives, challenges and issues is alarming” (Rural Policy Matters, 2003). The lack of research applies equally to rural education. “Research that specifically examines rural education is in a word, scant” (Sherwood, 2000. p. 160; see also Barley & Beesley, 2007; G. Collins, 2003; Howley et al., 2005; Nachtigal, 1994). Almost no funding has been made available to conduct education research in specifically rural contexts, and as a result, relatively few scholars have studied rural education issues (Sherwood, 2000). However rural education is an important issue for a number of countries, not least the USA:

Rural student enrollment is increasing both absolutely and as a percentage of the national student enrollment Meeting the needs of nearly ten million rural children is a challenge that is worthy of society’s attention. (Johnson & Strange, 2007, p.1)

Recent demographics have shown similar patterns are evolving in other western countries including New Zealand, and particularly in Central Otago, making both this research area and this study an important contribution to the literature.

2.2 Conceptual Framework for the Literature review

This research focuses on the professional leadership practices of rural principals in Otago, New Zealand. Effectiveness in a rural context appears to be determined by the

interrelationship of several factors; the principal as an effective leader, the nature and relatedness of the school to the local community, and the development of a community-based curriculum to cement the relationship.

The literature review will be divided into an investigation of these factors while recognising that in practice they are not separate but interrelated. The five sections are as follows:

- Educational research in a rural context;
- Leadership in small schools;
- Effective leadership practices;
- Curriculum and community; and
- Community and school relationships.

The terms principal and headteacher have been used synonymously throughout this review. The chapter will conclude with a summary of key points.

2.3 Educational Research in a Rural Context

There are contested views about what constitutes a small school and what constitutes rurality (Coladarci, 2007; Starr & White, 2008). Part of the problem for rural education and rural research has been a lack of a definitive understanding of *rural*.

“There is no internationally recognised definition of a “rural” area. Rural areas have traditionally been residual areas not included in the urban definition” (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). The word is often defined from an urban or outsider’s perspective.

Historically, this has been a major problem encountered in rural education where there

has been the notion that rural schools should be modeled after good urban schools. Herzog and Pitman (1995, 2002) argued that there is a preponderance of negative attitudes to all things rural, and the wide diversity that exists within rural areas is often ignored. In asking, “Where has all the ‘Rural’ gone?”, Sherwood (2000) found that educational researchers, “too often assess rural communities [and schools] in terms of inadequacy, as opposed to their assets” (p. 159). The misinformation surrounding many of the issues around consolidation is a case in point, where it is assumed almost universally that rural education is lacking in some respect (Bard, Gardener & Wieland, 2005). This had hardly changed even in recent times as Howley et al. (2005) found:

An ignorant mainstream, in fact, routinely presumes that rural schools (and cultures) are deficient, almost necessarily so. The rural outlook on living well is so different from the mainstream (suburban) norm that it is vilified and romanticized, and rarely understood or authentically appreciated by outsiders. (p. 5)

Even when attention is paid to rural, Sherwood (2000) argued that it is more often for the sake of a representative sampling than for learning something more substantive about rural schools.

Statistically, rural has been defined in America by the official U.S. Census Bureau, as communities where there are less than 2,500 inhabitants. New Zealand has a similar definition. For schools in New Zealand however, there is now an important difference. In 2002, Targeted Funding for Isolation (TFI) replaced Targeted Rural Funding (TRF).

TFI uses an Isolation Index, which is a weighted calculation using each school's distance from population centres of 5,000, 20,000 and 100,000 (that provide the range of

goods and services needed to operate schools and deliver the curriculum) to determine schools' relative isolation and eligibility for this funding. Schools with an isolation index of 1.65 or higher receive isolation funding. Schools with an index of less than 1.65 do not, even though they may be rural or semi-rural by location. Of the total number of schools eligible for isolation funding in 2002, (that is of *all* state and state integrated primary and secondary schools) 562 received isolation funding (Ministry of Education, 2009). In percentage terms this was 22% of all schools. In this definition of 'isolated', the criterion in New Zealand as in the United States has financial implications. Defining 'rural/isolated' is more than an academic concern. As Stern (1992) noted, "Funding eligibility and policy issues are frequently linked to a school's or school district's rurality - usually measured in terms of sparse settlement, isolation from population centre, or both" (p. 72).

The definition of rural remains a challenge, and to expect a simplistic definition is largely a "misstep" (Howley et al. 2005, p.1). For rural educators and researchers, the fact that the study takes place in rural surroundings does not necessarily make it a rural study. "The *rural* in rural is not most significantly the boundary around it, but the meanings inherent in rural lives, wherever lived" (Howley et al. 2005, p.1). Rurality is partly attitudinal, and embodies a sense of community, of belonging, in an area with small populations. However, the diverse nature of rural communities means that it is difficult to define a set of universal characteristics (Herzog & Pittman, 1995).

2.3.1 The role of schools and their importance to rural communities.

Rural schools are an integral part of the community, and the community is an integral part of the school (Beckner, 1996; Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; T. Collins, 2001; Lyson, 2005; Jimerson, 2006). In other words, the school and community are inextricably linked (Haas & Nachtigal 1998). According to Fisk (2002), “Rural schools [in New Zealand] form an important conduit for residents to establish the interactions that comprise a community” (p. 208). Jimerson (2006), in a retake of Coleman’s definition of social capital added that schools, “are frequently the glue that binds together small communities, serving as their economic and social hub” (p. 5).

Rural schools increasingly have taken over the role of being the centre of their community. In New Zealand, for example, Wright (2007) proposed that:

Churches no longer serve as the centers of community, and the services provided by the local government are not as plentiful as they were previously. Therefore, schools have become a crucial part of the community infrastructure in the rural areas of developed countries and have taken on a significant role in working with families and other social agencies. (p. 346)

Evidence suggests that schools in rural areas provide much more than educational services and are vital to the economic and social well-being of many communities (Kilpatrick et al., 2002; Lyson, 2002, 2005; Salant & Waller, 1998). Schools in rural communities play many roles, but their presence is also associated with many benefits. Lyson (2002) used data from the 1980, 1990, and the 2000 United States Census of Population, and focused his inquiry on two sets of rural communities: those with

populations of less than 500 and those with populations between 501 and 2,500 (the defining number for an area to be considered rural) within the State of New York. He found that:

Social and economic welfare in all rural communities is higher in places that have schools. Further, in the smallest villages which have fewer resources and fewer civic places, schools are especially critical to the social and economic well-being of the community. For policy makers, educational administrators, and local citizens, it is important to understand that schools are vital to rural communities. (Lyson, 2002, p. 131)

Lyson concluded that not only was the school the social hub serving as “nodes” (Lyson, 2005, p. 23) to anchor people to place, but they also acted as institutions, which solidified and defined community boundaries, and were an important indicator of economic viability and social vitality. Among the benefits Lyson found in communities with schools, housing values were higher, and municipal infrastructure was more developed. In the larger rural communities, differences were not as marked as in the smaller villages, but on virtually every indicator of social and economic well-being, rural communities that had schools ranked higher (Lyson, 2002).

Schools in rural communities play many roles, and often the multiplicity of roles is not recognized sufficiently. A series of five case studies investigating rural and community partnerships in each of the five states of Australia undertaken by Kilpatrick et al., (2002), found schools were a vital, but often overlooked, component of rural community development. The research evidenced rural schools provided a number of

economic and social benefits, many of which have not been well understood. A variety of positive outcomes were reported for both youth and the community. These included an increase in the retention of youth, not just at school but also in the community, and a range of benefits within cultural, economic, environmental and recreational domains both through sharing resources, and consuming local goods.

Findings supported the need to nurture “boundary crossers”, people (not necessarily the principal) who played an important role in building and maintaining school/community partnerships, and who provided continuity throughout the process (Kilpatrick et al, 2002). Important lessons learnt from the project were to remain flexible while maintaining continuity, and to involve external stakeholders from the beginning, while realising working partnerships with the community is a process that takes time.

The paucity of rural research has meant that rural research carried out in Australia as elsewhere has remained at the level of exploration and description, rather than as a critical analysis of the historical devolvement of responsibility and self management to schools, and immediate factors such as the prevalent drought occurring in Australia which have lead to the current state of rurality.

2.3.2 Rural schools and social capital.

Hanifan (1916) first discussed the notion that rural schools have a vital role in developing community resiliency through the development of social capital. Coleman (1988) defined the various types of social capital, and described it as the glue that held communities together. Since then, several rural researchers have alluded to the importance that rural schools have in creating and maintaining social capital (T. Collins, 2001; Hobbs, 1995; Miller, 1995; Peshkin, 1978; West-Burnham, 2002).

The focus has to shift from improving the school as an institution, measured by very limited criteria, to developing social capacity in the community – still measurable but using very different criteria. It is reasonable to argue that the development of social capital would be a major factor in facilitating school improvement. (Otero & West-Burnham, 2005, p. 18)

Communities must be resilient to be sustainable. Resiliency results as relationships among community members develop. This is the “bridging social capital” between heterogeneous groups, referred to by Putman (1995). Jimerson (2006) concluded that close interpersonal connections usually develop in smaller and rural communities because they are places where individuals know, share with, and care for one another. Rural schools mirror these qualities, and have a responsibility to help develop these healthy relationships through getting to know the groups and individuals within their community, and sharing with them a collective sense of purpose (Milstein & Henry, 2000; Wright, 2007). In turn, this social connectedness leads to the development of social capital and, ultimately, the sustainability of the community. Hobbs (1995) declared that enhancing and improving social capital was a particularly applicable approach for rural areas. Small schools and smaller communities, he argued, made the task of building closer relationships between school, community, and families potentially easier (Hobbs, 1995). Indeed for most rural localities, “The school is the principal vehicle of community identity—many rural residents think of their community as their school district” (Salant & Waller, 1998, p. 279).

West-Burnham (2002) argued that schools everywhere were one of the most powerful sources of networking in communities. The contacts of the students within a

school increased family and neighborhood contacts, and bolstered whatever community

“Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk and Mulford, (2000) noted the important focal role of schools’ sport as a network relationship builder and maintainer of social interaction within the community. Sports, and successful sports teams in particular, affirmed community identity. In New Zealand one has only to follow the fortunes of the Southern Steel (a netball team from Southland) or the Southern Stags (the representative rugby team for Southland) in Southland, a province of New Zealand, to see how powerful this can be as a unifying factor within the community.

Because schools in small communities encourage and shape the forms of social interaction that become stable and valued by community members, the school as the community’s tangible and symbolic focal point, like successful local sports teams, institutionalise a sense of collective identity. “It is only through various school functions can all residents find access to community ‘associational life’” (Salant & Waller 1998, p. 24). Through these social networks, stores of social capital are built that contribute to the community’s social well-being and to social cohesion. The school as a microcosm of its own community leads to students learning incidentally about the meaning of community life. According to Beck (1999), the most effective way to learn about community is through personal experience:

Instead of just teaching that community life is important, we have to build a classroom and school community where the benefits of close human relationships are apparent They also learn by direct experience how to ‘do’ these things; they learn the practice of community as well as the concepts. (p. 228)

The rural school has an important role in forging often neglected intergenerational links by opening up school facilities to all ages and encouraging both community involvement in, and ownership of school programs, for as Kelly and Sewell (1988) noted, “In our highly mobile, industrialized society, the connections we make with particular geographic communities are no longer automatic or permanent” (p.42). The school’s inseparability from its community thus ensures not just the school’s survival, but the community’s survival as well (Wright, 2007). This has implications for rural school’s curriculum to underpin the development of identity and unity with its community.

T. Collins (2001) found that strengthening the relationship between rural schools and their communities was a recurring theme in rural educational reform. Crucial to school effectiveness and to the community’s quality of life was a healthy relationship shared by school and community. Schools have a vested interest in the well-being of their community, and vice versa, recognised by Hobbs (1995) who declared “Where this reciprocity is acknowledged and becomes mutually reinforcing, it forms part of the social capital important to student success, while simultaneously increasing a community’s capacity for economic development” (p. 274).

Much of the research on rural schools has painted an almost rosy picture of harmony, or has presupposed that connections between rural schools and communities are positive, healthy, and ongoing. However, in some instances rural schools through their policies or their particular personnel have created divisions within communities. If research on rural communities is sparse, then research on communities in strife is almost non-existent. Small communities are particularly vulnerable to influences emanating from the school. The effects of a weak or ineffectual principal in a small community are

familiar to those who live in them. A number of rural Otago schools are still recovering from the effects of negative publicity from poor Education Review Office (ERO) and “shame and blame” reports by various reporters from the local paper (for example, Conaway, 2002).

Rural communities tend to be less diverse in terms of racial mix, and more conservative than communities which have a greater population base (Jimerson, 2006). A true sense of community has been evidenced to be developmental, and therefore evolved over time with a shared vision carefully implemented and planned for (Kilpatrick et al., 2002). This development is sometimes associated with the longevity of the appointment of the school principal. Early and Weindling (2007) have suggested that there is a shelf life to principalship, and as such this would affect the course and depth of community relationships. Leonard, Leonard and Sackney (2001) maintained that there was a lot of rhetoric about rural school and community relationships but a “scarcity of empirical evidence that establishes that the potential for effectiveness necessarily is realized in actuality” (Leonard et. al., p. 5). For this to happen, they argued, there is the need for those involved to make a concerted effort to cultivate those “purported, inherent, small-school characteristics considered to have the capacity to create vibrant learning communities” (Leonard et al., 2001, p. 94).

A need exists for research into areas where the relationships between schools and communities have broken down, to determine whether there is an emergent pattern which can be turned around for the continued viability of both the community and the school.

O’Neal and Cox (2002), in a 20-year retrospective analysis of the literature on rural schools in the U.S.A., found a great deal of the literature addressing the strengths and weaknesses of small rural schools to be as relevant today as it was 20 years earlier. Advantages for students included greater participation in all aspects of school life, which had a positive impact on achievement and a sense of belonging within a safe environment. For rural teachers, smaller classes allowed for individualised instruction promoting personalized learning, and a follow through for teachers of feeling better about their work because of student engagement (Jimerson, 2006).

O’Neal and Cox (2002) discovered that schools which had a strong relationship with their community had the potential to “satisfy the wide panoply of educational demands and desires of the community at large” (p.14). Strike (2008) believed that the core for small schools movement in larger schools, or “small schools paradigm,” was about establishing communities within larger elements. Alleviating alienation was achieved through community, and not just curriculum, although this too was important.

The closer relationships made possible in smaller schools was recognised by students as contributing to a safer environment (Jimerson, 2006). Wasley et al. (2000) found that when students of small schools were asked why they fight less than students in the host [larger] school, they answered, “because we know one another” (p. 42). Jimerson (2006) concluded that small schools were places where students learnt about building relationships, and the skills to cooperate, disagree, and negotiate with other students and with teachers (see also Wright, 2000, 2007).

Disadvantages of rural schools of 20 years ago tend also to be relevant for today, for example, the difficulty of providing a broad and variegated curriculum (O’Neal & Cox, 2002). However, it has been suggested that recent improvements in Internet coverage, distance education, and fibre optic cable, may help to alleviate this challenge, particularly in areas such as Australia (Starr & White, 2008) and in New Zealand, where Ministry of Education (MOE) priorities have meant increased expenditure on hooking up all rural area schools to allow for better video conferencing, an all important component of distance courses. OtagoNet for example, is the group of secondary and area schools network in Otago.

2.3.4 Other similar clusters exist in other areas of New Zealand.

Distance from tertiary level providers and other educational institutions such as museums and libraries was another disadvantage faced by many rural schools. “The opportunity to participate in summer, remedial and enrichment programs is often missed as a result” (Lawless, 2009, p. 20). Gibbs (2000) commented on lack of role models and little exposure to high skill occupations that tended to be the norm in rural situations. To these potential disadvantages must be added the difficulty of providing pre-school education, and accessible opportunities for any after school activities.

O’Neal and Cox (2002) have argued that the homogeneity of the student body could prove disadvantageous because of its paucity in providing varying and contrasting psychological environments for students to learn in and from, but in contrast, Wright (2007) found in New Zealand schools that:

When a limited number of children spend time with one another day after day, a way to resolve frictional differences must be found. . . . Learning to get along and to solve problems collectively has implications for developing critical life skills and an incipient sense of community. (p. 348)

Perhaps the greatest disadvantage found by researchers for rural schools throughout most of the western world was the capacity to attract and retain experienced teachers (Reeves & Bylund, 2005; Lawless, 2009; O’Neal & Cox, 2002; Robinson, Blaine & Pace, 2004). For as Monk (2007) found, “teacher turnover is often high, and hiring can be difficult. Monk observes that rural schools have a below-average share of highly trained teachers” (p. 155)

Teachers are often isolated as a profession, making exchanges of professional ideas difficult, and when geographic isolation is included, “there is a clear and present danger of cultural impoverishment” (O’Neal & Cox, 2002, p. 16). Gibbs (2000) argued that the lower pay in rural areas, particularly for the more experienced teachers who thus find the advantages of rural living less effective, created another factor.

There are other disadvantages for staff in rural schools than simply factors relating to isolation or monetary considerations. Wilson and Brundrett (2005) point out the complications of vertical class groupings and the necessity for teachers to cover more than one specialist area. They also contend that for small schools in the United Kingdom, the use of narrow assessment criteria and associated publishing of results as a percentage in League tables have made it difficult to achieve high scores (Wilson & Brundrett, 2005).

It will be interesting to note the effect on rural education in New Zealand with the introduction of the recent and controversial National Standards.

A problem with rural educational research has been that in reporting rural school advantages and disadvantages, most rural researchers have relied on uncontested self reports from rural inhabitants or rural principals, to either affirm or deny the assumptions arising from their research. This has partly been as a result of the paucity of rural research in general which examines rurality as a factor. Limited comparison has been made in quantitative terms, nor has there been a critical focus on why these factors occur. Much of the writing about rural areas has been by people who have lived in rural areas, and assumes an uncritical stance of benevolent regard stemming from their positive experiences.

2.3.5 Successful rural schools.

A large national study carried out by McREL in the USA in 2005 to identify differences between high-performing, high-needs schools and low-performing, high-needs schools, identified four probable components of success: leadership, instruction, professional community, and school environment. As part of this McREL study, Barley and Beesley (2006) undertook a further investigation within the central United States region of four high-needs rural schools that had beaten the odds by being successful.

Several prevalent themes across the four schools were found to be instrumental to their success: community support and involvement, a culture of caring, leadership, and extra curricular participation. In all the schools there was a shared belief that the school played a large role in holding the community together with close interrelationships, and a

culture of caring leading to shared feelings of belonging and safety. The schools actively sought parent involvement, and principals were recognised as being fully involved in school programmes and supportive of staff, so that decisions were shared rather than “remote mandates” (p.11). Unlike many other rural schools, teacher retention was a key factor. The retention of teachers, it was felt, ultimately lead to consistency and stability, which in turn lead to school improvement.

Believing that the rural context was different in important aspects from the context of ordinary schools, Barley and Beesley (2007) undertook a further study based solely in successful high-needs, rural schools. Within this study, they investigated rural school success indicators.

Participants in this study were principals of 21 United States rural schools. The two phase study found a number of factors rated as very important by principals: high academic and behavioural expectations of students, structural supports for learning, the use of student data in alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment, individualisation of instruction, teacher retention, and professional development (Barley & Beesley, 2007). The common themes of community support, a caring culture, parent involvement, and strong leadership which believed in the power of distributive forms, found in Barley & Beesley’s 2006 study of four schools were replicated in the 2007 research. A less transient population than is normally experienced in rural populations may also have been a contributing factor. Site visits to a further five schools provided support for the data derived from principal interviews.

A particular strength of the Barley and Beesley (2006, 2007) research was the strong emphasis on triangulation of data which did not rely solely on principals' evidence but sought confirmation from staff, community members and public records. All of the schools in both studies were chosen from schools identified as high-needs schools. It would be interesting to note whether more affluent schools in similar contexts would yield the same factors as determinants of success, particularly in light of earlier research findings by Howley (1996) who found that rural schools did not seem to facilitate the achievement of affluent students.

Limited research has explored the influence of variables, for example, rurality and poverty on student achievement. The influence of success factors for rural schools is still at the exploratory stage and more research is needed to compare and isolate these success factors with schools in other contexts. Research undertaken with high-needs but low performing rural schools would serve as a useful comparison. However, the commonality of themes across all the case studies, and in much other research on rural and small schools, gives credence to a supposition that generalisations can be made for rural success (G. Collins, 2003; T. Collins, 2001; Haas, 1998; Jimerson, 2006; Nachtigal, 1994; Wright, 2007).

2.3.6 Does context matter?

There can be little doubt that the environment in which a leader works strongly influences leadership (Goldring & Huff, 2008; Hallinger & Heck, 1996a; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). Contingency theory posits the underlying notion that a principal's work context is a major determinant of their behaviour. School context in turn

is equally influential. Socio-economic, demographic, cultural and historical factors combine to determine the intake of every school and the communities they serve. The type and phase of school, its size and location have an enormous influence (Chalker, 1999; Jimerson, 2006; Starr & White, 2008; Strike, 2008; Thrupp, 1999). Southworth (2002) declared “One of the most robust findings from leadership research is that context matters” (p. 451). Ewington et al. (2008) added, “School leadership is sensitive to context . . . but literature about school leadership is often undifferentiated paying little attention to characteristics of particular school environments” (p. 545). Clarke and Wildy (2004) found that leadership was always context bound, and argued that to generate meaningful theories about leadership, it needed to be viewed in depth from the inside, focusing on practicing leaders in a specific context such as rural.

2.3.6.1 The Iowa study.

Research carried out in three rural Iowa districts by Robinson, Blaine and Pace (2004) to analyse the effects of context, compared the issues and experiences of schooling in small rural schools with large urban schools investigated in the earlier Claremont large urban school study (p. 2). Findings from the Iowa study mirrored the close personal interactions in many rural areas in New Zealand (G. Collins, 2003; Wright, 2003, 2007). While small size was considered mainly positive, negative aspects such as smaller class offerings, and the difficulty of retaining younger teachers or qualified Information Communication Technology (ICT) specialists were recognised as they were in Fisk’s (2002) study in NZ (see also disadvantages of rural school above).

Major differences, as expected, were found between the two contexts. The authors acknowledged the Claremont study had a student population who were racially and ethnically diverse, whereas the Iowa schools were racially and ethnically homogeneous. Despite this, many of the issues recognised were similar, but the results were very different.

Relationships were a central issue for both studies. In contrast to the urban schools the rural schools generally showed positive relationships between teachers, students, parents and community. The environment in a rural context was a positive factor which often added to the school/community interrelationships through shared interests, but was a negative factor for urban environments with rundown buildings and less involved teachers.

Robinson et al, (2004) found that the narrow standardised curriculum found in urban schools was not motivating for students and was contrasted with the more localised curriculum of the rural schools that utilised local environment as curriculum, which lead to positive motivation, interest and participation.

General feelings of hopelessness and a sense of despair were prevalent amongst the large urban communities, whereas:

the smallness found in the rural districts contributed to a ... community that often provided the individual attention, the connection to parents, and caring relationships between students and between students and teachers that many of the participants in the original Claremont research desired. (Robinson, Blaine & Pace, 2004, p. 7)

Like many rural counterparts in other western countries, rural schools in Iowa are facing their own problems of decreased budgets, shrinking populations, attracting and retaining good teachers, and limited community resources. Change that may be forced on them includes further consolidations into larger schools, and fewer districts. The question needs to be asked - will the current push for larger more efficient schools undermine the kinds of education occurring in rural schools in this study and in many others? (Rural Policy Matters, 2006). "It is indeed ironic" Jimerson (2006) argued, that in many rural areas in America, as elsewhere in western educational systems, the push is for consolidation of small schools and that "these efforts persist in spite of overwhelming evidence that smaller schools are beneficial for kids" and "even more illogical . . . where urban educators, recognizing the proven advantages of small schools, are actively pursuing a 'smaller is better' model" (p. 5). Results from the Iowa study demonstrate that context of the research can be critical to the results found. However, it may have been more illustrative for the Iowa schools to be of a more similar size to their urban counterparts than to be different in context and size. Rural schools in the Iowa research again, tended to be large schools in a New Zealand context. A criticism of rural research has been that rural education research often lacks adequate controls or comparison groups and therefore valid generalisations or comparisons cannot be made (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005). Comparison groups had been sought and used in both the Iowa study and the Beesley and Barley studies.

"Smallness has been interwoven with many of today's reform themes, and with other features and conditions currently recommended for schools. Interest in and examination of small schools appear to be thriving" (Raywid, 1999, p. 4). This presents

an opportunity for rural schools' research to capitalise on the current interest which has been maintained in the first decade of the new century. As Herzog & Pittman (2002) noted:

It is curious that rural communities, which for so long have been marginalized by the dominant culture, have precisely the qualities for which critics of American schools are now looking. As educators, we need to recognize these strengths and take advantage of them, and build the preparation of rural school leaders around them. (p. 22)

There is a widespread belief among politicians and the general public that leadership is critical for making a difference to the quality of schools and the achievement of their students (Robinson et al., 2009). It may be correct to assume that leadership in small and rural schools can be even more of a critical factor because the impact of their practices are more direct and the mediating factor of other possible leaders is minimised.

2.4 Leadership in small schools

Little research has been undertaken examining leadership in the context of small schools (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; G. Collins, 2003; Ewington et al., 2008; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Southworth, 2002; Wilson & McPake, 1998, 2000). Much of the research undertaken in small schools, Wilson and Brundrett, (2005) contended, has not concentrated on the role of the head but rather the quality of curricular provision. Murdoch and Schiller (2002) argued, "it has often been assumed that the principalship role in smaller primary schools is a 'scaled down' version of the full time primary

principalship and that similar leadership and management approaches apply” (p. 1). This is the same mistaken assumption that prevails in American research (Jimerson, 2006; Stern, 1994), or that running a small school is considerably easier than running a large one (Wilson & Brundrett, 2005).

Western education systems and their leaders now view leadership as a key issue, both to resource and nurture, and the focus has shifted (in small schools as well) from management to leadership. The number of small schools in New Zealand, in rural Australia, and in Scotland make this an important area to research to inform existing and future aspiring leaders. It is from these countries, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand, that the main thrust for research on small school leadership has taken place in the last decade.

The findings from the research in these three countries are remarkably similar in terms of the characteristics of small school leaders, and the complexity of the job. An important conclusion reached in all the research was that context mattered (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Context is important in view of the finding of Mendez-Morse (1992) who avowed, “one of the major findings of the effective schools research was the identification of instructional leadership as a significant aspect of effective schools” (p. 17). Principals of rural schools in New Zealand (and in Scotland and Australia), are generally teaching principals. A number of researchers have argued the need for a research agenda that investigates small school leadership (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Southworth, 2002). This research project is intended to contribute to that knowledge.

2.4.1 Small schools.

What then is a small school? According to the 1991 *New Zealand Small Schools Review*, it is difficult to identify any one factor that determines that a school is small (Ministry of Education, 1991). While the predominant factor has tended to be role size, “smallness” as a concept can be influenced by a number of factors – geographical, demographic, social and educational. Some systems use a combination of both role size and number of staff to compare large and small. Small schools, for the purpose of this study, are those where the principal has a teaching component. In New Zealand, principals are fully released from teaching duties at the point of six full-time staff members, or 180 pupils. Scottish research took 120 pupils as their defining point for small schools.

Scotland has a large number of small primary schools, and like their counterparts in New Zealand and Australia, the head teachers of these tend to be teaching principals with a significant teaching component. In the case of the smaller schools, that is, those with roles under 50, this teaching component presents the bulk of the work required and may be up to 70% of time. For these principals the teaching component is their priority commitment, but it is often interrupted by the demands of administration. The inevitable duality of the role has become “exacerbated” as schools have become increasingly self managing (Wilson & Brundrett, 2005).

New Zealand like Scotland has a high proportion of small schools. Over 50% of all primary schools in New Zealand have rolls less than 180 (i.e. they are “small”) and over 390 of the total 2045 schools have rolls of less than 50. This equates to 20% of schools

in New Zealand that are smaller “small” schools. Of this group of schools, 98% are rural (Statistics New Zealand, 2006).

A quarter of schools in Australia can be classified as small, and in Tasmania, 29% of the 195 public schools are (Ewington et al., 2008). In Queensland small schools of 100 pupils or less number over 30% of all schools (Clarke, 2002).

2.4.1.1 Profile of the small school principal.

Historically, small rural districts hired one person to fulfill multiple roles of teacher, principal, health professional, and custodian. Little has changed today for rural principals. Small school systems mean, that a single administrator (or principal) is given several co-ordinated responsibilities, fiscal, property and curricular, which would normally warrant separate positions in larger schools.

Scottish researchers Wilson and McPake (2000) compiled a profile of small school head teachers in 1998, which is very similar to that in New Zealand, as evidenced in the Livingstone survey (1999), research undertaken by G. Collins, 2003, and in research undertaken in Australia (Ewington et al., 2008; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002).

Small school principals tend to be overwhelmingly female (92% from Scottish survey and only slightly less in New Zealand and Australia), and are generally between 40 – 60 years. New appointees tend to be graduates from national universities, and were more commonly principals of smaller, small schools (that is those with role numbers 50 or less). Principals of these very small schools generally tend to be in their first appointment, and in all three countries, had been in the position for less than four years at the time of the reports. The average teaching experience across the three countries

tended to be 19 years, whereas it was more common to have 28 years teaching experience for principals of larger schools. New Zealand has had some exceptions to these findings, with a number of principals in very remote rural areas (traditionally harder to staff), being in their first five years of teaching.

Forty six percent of Scottish head teachers of small schools came from a rural background and the majority (71%) lived outside their school's catchment area. Personal qualities that school leaders felt were important for success in small schools included flexibility, adaptability, ability to organise and prioritise, and a sense of humour (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Wilson & McPake, 1998, Wilson, 2007). In general, principals saw themselves as part of the teaching team, and worked with others as colleagues, leading from within rather than directing from outside. Because they remained firmly anchored to their original professional group as teachers, principals were more likely to derive their authority from their professional teaching expertise rather than from their position in the school (Wilson & McPake, 2000). Similar results were found in New Zealand (G. Collins, 2003) where principals generally come from the teaching ranks. The leadership style in Scottish small schools was identified as "contingent" (Wilson & McPake, 2000, p. vii), with shared vision, collegiate approach and an ability to utilise all resources available.

2.4.1.2 Research from England.

Southworth's empirical study of primary school leaders in the United Kingdom "aim[ed] to compare and contrast leadership in small, medium and large primary schools" (Southworth, 2002, p. 451), was the first internationally recognised study to

advocate further research into small school leadership. Given the preoccupation with urban schooling and the fact that most small schools tend to be found in a rural setting, small rural schools or their leaders were not given a high priority. Too much of the current interest in educational leadership, Southworth argued, was based on too little evidence. Southworth's findings were compiled from a study of twelve principals of successful, small, (roles of <150), primary schools in England.

Southworth (2002) articulated a number of reasons why the study of small school principals was important "One of the most robust findings of school effectiveness research is that purposeful leadership by the headteacher is crucial to the school's high performance" (p. 452); "Leaders in small schools offer a particularly rich source of knowledge [of instructional leadership] that has hitherto not been developed" (p. 479); and "Far from according them low esteem and paying them little attention because they lead 'small' schools, they may well be potentially rich subjects for learning about instructional and educational leadership" (p. 481).

Southworth's (2002) "instructional heads" (p. 472) used three strategies consistently to reinforce the quality of teaching and learning: modelling through their own teaching, monitoring through a range of strategies to convey expectations of high standards of teaching performance, and professional dialogue both formal and informal.

Southworth emphasised the emotional intelligence capabilities of these small school heads, and their implicit belief in the "primacy of personal contact" (p. 477) and dialogic approaches. It was because of their teaching component and this close personal contact with other staff that provided a particularly rich source of knowledge of instructional leadership. This is complemented by Riordan's (2003) findings that the level

of involvement of principals as instructional leaders often dictated whether attempts to change instruction succeeded.

Southworth (2002) found that job satisfaction came from teaching: “it is all about the children” (p. 462) and pressures from “the fact there is never enough time . . . and juggling time, money and loyalties – between home and school” (pp. 462-3). These conclusions replicated findings in the other countries research.

However, Southworth’s findings on his 12 small schools would equate to large schools in the New Zealand context. If, as Southworth (2004) found, the strategies of small school principals were qualitatively different than larger school principals, would the strategies of even smaller small schools such as those in New Zealand be different again? This research is intended to address the gap in the knowledge of small school leadership practice in New Zealand, and to increase the knowledge base about leadership of rural schools generally in order to allow further comparisons to be made internationally about context, and its affect on differentiated practice.

The small number of schools used in Southworth’s (2002, 2004) research is illustrative of one of the main problems with small and rural school research. Generally speaking, numbers in research studies of rural schools tend to be limited for a variety of reasons, some emanating from practicalities such as distances between schools, and some from financial considerations. Rural schools are not always considered to be financially viable for research despite their numerical frequency in various countries, because the research tends to be expensive given the required amount of time to both collect and analyse data.

2.4.1.3 Research from Scotland.

The overarching aim of the research by Wilson (2007), was to revisit a sample of the small schools which had participated in the Wilson and McPake (1998), large-scale

study of all 863 small schools in Scotland with a roll of 120 pupils or less, to ascertain the leadership style that had been developed by headteachers in the intervening 10 years.

In the 2007 research, nine principals from schools with a roll of 50 pupils or less were purposefully chosen within three different local authorities in Scotland for case studies. A focus on teaching principals led to a further survey of 100 small schools with pupil rolls of 50 or less.

Wilson (2007) found with the exception of the 1998 original research with McPake, that there was still very little research on small schools in Scotland or in the United Kingdom generally. In the intervening years, the focus on leaders in small schools like their larger counterparts had shifted from management to leadership.

The predominant issue for leaders in small schools (as in the 1998 study), was the duality of the role of the teaching head. This “double load” (Dunning, 1993) often received no recognition in discussion about standards of leadership and many headteachers found this dual role problematical. This had been exacerbated in the 2007 study, (as it has in New Zealand), by the extra component of finding “class contact reduction” (classroom release – New Zealand) time for their teachers.

Unlike 1998, more of the headteachers appeared to be settled and content to remain in the position (52% in the latest study), a result replicated by G. Collins (2003) in New Zealand. However, a large number (59% in 2007) reported that they were more stressed than they used to be, with almost a quarter of these headteachers associating part of that stress with isolation, the rate of change, and associated workload. Evidence from research

would show their counterparts in New Zealand and Australia would concur (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; G. Collins, 2003; Livingstone, 1999).

The key finding from the research was that despite the changes that have occurred during the ten years between the two research studies, the essential elements of the role of headteacher of a small school remained largely the same. Most were still teaching headteachers with a complex dual role of teaching and leading. Support was relatively poor, although moves were being made for new headteachers to attend professional development and courses, both prior and during their headship. The uncertainty about the future of small schools coupled with the reported unwillingness of applicants for the position made the work of the teaching headteacher in Scotland especially challenging. This finding resonates with principals in New Zealand.

The strength of this research was the correlation with the earlier large-scale investigation of leadership of small schools in Scotland, and for this study the particular focus on small (< 50 students) schools which equate more closely with those in New Zealand.

2.4.1.4 Research from Australia.

Murdoch and Schiller (2002) found that little research had been conducted in Australia into the teaching primary principalship. Consequently, limited recognition was given to the dual role challenges experienced by principals, particularly in systems which were devolving.

Murdoch and Schiller (2002) used a mixed method research design involving a purposeful sample of 9 teaching principals from New South Wales schools with enrolments from 26 – 159 students to gain a broader understanding of the complexities of

the role of teaching principals. Stage two involved a parallel sample survey of all 133 primary teaching principals of small schools.

Results showed 50% of the 133 principals surveyed had just one to five years principalship experience. In schools with less than 50 students, 87% of these principals had remained in principalship for less than 10 years, and many had left the education sector altogether (Murdoch & Schiller, 2002).

Positive aspects of the job such as the joy of teaching and making a difference reported by the in depth interviews replicated those found in other small school research (Southworth, 2002; Wilson, 2007). Community involvement was strong, with a concomitant strong expectation that principals would be involved in community activities and events. Parents' high expectations for their children created extra pressure for principals because of the increasing trend to seek support from them on student and personal welfare issues (Murdoch & Schiller, 2002). Unlike New Zealand, parental involvement in school governance was limited in matters of school governance.

Clarke and Wildy embarked on a combined project in Queensland (Clarke, Stevens & Wildy, 2006) and Western Australia (Clarke & Wildy, 2004) with the aim of understanding the contextual complexity in small schools' leadership:

The relatively limited literature on leadership in small schools . . . indicates a focus on the challenges of the role. Absent from this literature, though, is any conceptualisation of how principals of small schools deal with the contextual complexity of their work. (Clarke & Wildy, 2004, p. 559)

Clarke and Wildy (2004) argued that one of the first reasons to focus on leadership in small schools in Australia at least, was their numerical significance. In Queensland there were almost 500 schools with fewer than 125 students (over a quarter of all Queensland schools) which had a principal who had substantial teaching commitments and a full administrative role. In Western Australia, these schools number 26% of the total number of schools (Clarke & Wildy, 2004).

Four rural and remote schools with novice principals, were selected in Queensland in 2006, and four comparative small rural schools in Western Australia in 2004, for a period of study over two months. Novice principals were selected because it was felt their accounts would allow the complexities of the job to feature more strongly.

The short narrative accounts, which represented the data from interviews and observations with each principal, highlighted aspects found in many rural areas which impact on the school and school leadership: a downturn in rural economies, unemployment, declining populations, and other demographic changes (Clarke et al., 2006). The narratives also highlighted aspects of rural communities relevant in New Zealand and Scottish rural contexts. For example, the attitude towards gender roles where males were generally preferred as they were seen to have “more authority than their female counterparts” (Clarke et al, 2006, p. 82). Perceptions of the teaching skills credentials of the incoming principal were important, as they could have an enduring effect after the initial appointment. Initial circumstances were crucial in determining how a principal was received by the school community, a factor rarely considered in focusing on the issues surrounding small schools. Scepticism was often encountered by new principals in rural areas, especially if the principal was perceived to be from an urban

area (Clarke et al., 2006, p. 82). In many areas new principals have had to deal with the angst caused by high turnover rates of previous principals.

A reoccurring theme in nearly all countries' research and one of the tensions of small school life stemmed from maintaining a balance of privacy and professional practice (G. Collins, 2003; Fisk, 2002; Wilson, 2007). A high level of emotional intelligence was found as a factor through many of the narratives complementing the findings of Southworth (2002) and other small school research, and deserved more recognition in the appointments process (Clarke et al. 2006; see also G. Collins, 2003; Southworth, 2002).

Clarke and Wildy (2004) believed that presenting authentic accounts of how small school principals dealt with the challenges and issues related to their role would encourage other aspirant small school leaders or small school leaders themselves to reflect on the accounts, make comparisons and contrasts, and in this way to develop an interpretation of their own circumstances, or to develop strategies to deal with the challenges in their own circumstances. Doing so they believed would help “shift the discourse on transformational approaches to leadership from a predominantly normative level to one that is more descriptive” (p. 87) and thereby a better understanding of the role of rural principals.

Ewington et al. (2008), in a major study of 195 Tasmanian government schools, argued for greater attention to be paid to small school principalship. Survey data from the international successful school principals project in Tasmania involving the 195 schools was analysed and compared with previous research findings.

Ewington et al. (2008) found that principals in schools with less than 100 pupils tended to follow the pattern of inexperience with less than 4 years as principals compared to 9.4 years in large schools, taught for over 50% of the total school week and found the double load phenomenon an issue (p. 550).

For all 195 schools, the most frequently mentioned improvements over the past five years or future improvements for change were curriculum and pedagogical reform (36%). In contrast to a number of other studies, small schools in this study (roles < than 100) found community relations troubling, with comments such as “tackling community bullying and harassment” and “lack of support in the community” (Ewington et al., 2008, p. 552). Principals of these smaller schools were found to be twice as likely to report negative relations with the local community.

In contrast to other rural areas, principals of small schools in Tasmania were not believers in the importance of staff collaboration or likely to contribute to it. Neither did they have high expectations of students, nor believe that parents had a right to choose a school for their children. This was a marked difference from other studies in similar rural situations in Australia and elsewhere (Clarke, 2002; Collins, 2002; Jimerson, 2006; O’Neal & Cox, 2002) and warrants further investigation as to whether the principals experiences of negative relations with their communities in Tasmania have coloured their perspective, or whether it was part of the general feeling of “growing dissatisfaction” (Ewington et al., 2008, p. 547) arising from the greater use of mandated centrally driven strategies taking place in Tasmania. Despite this finding, rural schools in Tasmania were still found to be important local organisations that help sustain social networks by acting as a local resource for social events and sporting venues.

Starr and White (2008), used grounded theory to examine challenges faced by 76 principals of small rural schools in Victoria. The most common challenge identified was workload intensification alongside the proliferation of roles within leadership of small rural schools, equity issues and school survival. A clear concern was expressed that these commonly shared rural school issues were creating succession problems by deterring potential aspirants who saw principalship as requiring too much effort (p. 4). Rural principals felt increasingly marginalised and perceived that the discourse surrounding education were changing with “deleterious effects” (p. 5) particularly for small schools.

Like their counterparts in New Zealand, principals in rural Victoria have turned to clusters as a means of comprehensive collaboration to make the running of schools more efficient and time effective, as well as a means of support and sharing of expertise (Starr & White, 2008). Starr and White found that these forms of collaborative clustered leadership required community builders, or Kilpatrick et al.’s (2002) “boundary crossers” and that the link was very evident “that successful small rural principals are community builders who make strong partnerships with community operatives” (Starr & White, 2008, p. 9).

Starr and White (2008) found that principals highlighted ICT as an essential resource, and reaffirmed the affinity they had with their communities over environmental issues. Curricula of these schools, as in many rural schools, highlighted cross-disciplinary environmental, cultural and community projects, establishing a “recursive positive relationship between small rural schools, their communities, and the environment” (Starr & White, 2008, p. 9) See also Wright, (2003, 2007).

Research of rural schools’ principals in Australia tend to follow similar patterns of uncritical description of the principals’ work. Some attempts has been made to ground the

research in the recent devolving systems of school based management, but the underlying political agenda of many of the changes which underpin the issues of concern raised have been largely unexplored or critically analysed other than in this study by Star and White (2008). A strength of the Australian research, however, was the larger numbers available in some of the studies, for example all 195 of the schools in Tasmania and 76 rural principals in Victoria.

2.4.1.5 Research from New Zealand.

In New Zealand, a number of surveys have been used to gain information regarding principals and their work. Some of these have focussed specifically on teaching principals. Much of the work on the impact of reforms in education during the 1990s has relied on research by Wylie (1994, 1997, 1999) on behalf of NZCER and the MOE. However, most of her research focused on principals in general, and not specifically on rural school principals. Similarly, the Hay Group report commissioned in 2001 included only one teaching principal so that their conclusions tend to be less relevant for small schools.

In 1999 the NZEI Te Riu Roa, the primary schools' teachers' union commissioned a report by Chartwell Consultants as part of a campaign to highlight issues relating to teaching principals. Termed the *Livingstone Report* (Livingston, 1999), the survey focussed on five issues; workload, satisfiers and dissatisfiers in the role, preparation and training received, recruitment and retention factors, and suggestions for improvement.

Results indicated a unanimous agreement from principals that workloads were increasing consistently and rapidly. This remains an issue today in all countries surveyed.

Gronn (2003c) argued that this is a particular feature of what he terms “designer-leadership” (p. 283) which has as its focus a control over the decisions that a principal can make. Designer leadership, Gronn (2003c) stipulated, is also embodied by standards such as those introduced in most western countries, to which incumbent and aspiring leaders are expected to conform, and this conformity of practice is adjudged by “auditing and inspectorial agencies” (Gronn, 2003c, p. 284). Shades of ERO or The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) indeed! Additionally, various forms of empirical data (such as a reliance on “evidence based” data) are privileged in an attempt to drive leaders’ decisions (Gronn, 2003c). One wonders what Gronn would make of the Best Evidence Iterations recently launched in New Zealand?

Major satisfiers were similar to results from research in other countries – the pleasure of teaching, working alongside supportive colleagues, the opportunity to engage in leadership, and recognition accorded by parents and community. Dissatisfiers on the other hand also reflected those found in other countries research; workload, maintaining a balance between professional life and private life, and ERO reviews. Given a choice, 40% of respondents at this time of the 1999 Livingstone report, indicated they would leave the teaching service immediately.

In the decade since the Livingstone survey, many changes have occurred as was found in the two Scottish investigations. An induction programme for new principals was introduced in 2002. The First-time Principals Programme (FTPP) is a nation-wide, eighteen-month induction programme designed to meet the needs of participating principals from all regions, sectors, and types of schools. The objective of the programme is to develop the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of first-time principals to support

their successful school leadership. As most first time principals are coincidentally small or rural principals, this could have a major bearing on principalship, and practices of principals in small school settings. However, to date little research has been published or has even focused on the impact of this programme. In the research for this particular project, a first time principal has been purposefully chosen to allow for possible comparison and the impact this has had on their professional practice.

As a result of the staffing review in 2001 stemming from the Hay Group report, a management component which had been built into all schools was proportionately increased for schools with teaching principals. Release management time was set with a minimum release time of .3 FTE for the U1 schools with rolls less than 26. This management component increased as the grade of school increases so that by U4 (7 + teachers) the principal would not have a teaching component at all. A number of initiatives have been introduced to assist schools in developing processes which provide support for teaching principals and others. Most notable has been the development of clusters similar to Tasmania and Victoria, consisting of clusters of local schools for sharing resources and disseminating information, and different clusters (not necessarily local) for professional development.

A further survey was commissioned by the New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) in 2005 (Hodgen & Wylie, 2005), focussing on stress, and well being, amongst principals in New Zealand. While not specifically aimed at teaching principals or small schools, a number of relevant issues were found relating to this sector. The main stressors were role related. Teaching principals of small schools, rural schools, and principals of schools where rolls were fluctuating or declining, and to a lesser extent, principals of low socioeconomic decile schools, found these role related pressures very stressful.

A major study of the relationship between small school principalship and government policy was completed by G. Collins in 2003. He commented on the fact that his review of the literature had found only one example, which compared the leadership strategies of principals in “larger” small schools with those in “smaller” small schools (in New Zealand terms). G. Collins (2003) replicated the survey of workload by Livingstone in 1999, and sent this survey to principals of all small schools in the Central District region of New Zealand. From respondents, Collins interviewed 16 teaching principals, nominated as successful in their current role, from a range of localities and school sizes.

In his report on the major findings, G. Collins (2004) found several differences from the earlier surveys in New Zealand. Principals were more likely to report a positive response to their position compared with earlier findings from the late 1990s. Compared to the earlier 40%, it was by 17.5% who indicated that they would prefer to leave teaching in the next 12 months (G. Collins, 2004, p. 24), and while they still reported large workloads, hours had reduced to an average 62 hours per week.

G. Collins (2004) reported that the way principals in New Zealand tackled their roles differed from small to larger schools. Smaller school principals (one to two teachers) were more likely to be at the forefront of classroom teaching and put considerable emphasis on this (believing like their Australian counterparts that it lead to gaining initial credibility within the local community. Larger school principals (above U1) typically used a distributed leadership format, with an advisor or outside “experts” during development, and/or a more indirect means of building capacity amongst staff to lead aspects of development It will be interesting to note whether this holds for the present research.

Collins (2003, 2004) found a similar set of personal qualities shared by the New Zealand principals to those in England (Soutworth, 2002). Emotional intelligence, support of staff, close relationships, approachability, and team membership were all considered important individual characteristics by principals in both countries (G. Collins, 2003, 2004; Southworth, 2002, 2004).

More recently published, and of importance for New Zealand principals, is the Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd. (2009) research titled '*School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why,*' is one of a series of Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) reports commissioned by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand. The research provided a blueprint for New Zealand principals, identifying the dimensions of school leadership and leadership practices that make a difference for students, and a description of the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for effective leadership. It acknowledged the distributive nature of good leadership practice and proposed a model of leadership for learning that required a team approach, with a mixture of expertise from both within and outside the school. The critical importance of family and community, as recognised by rural schools, was acknowledged as vital. Gronn (2003c) however, argued that the BES is part of the privileged type of data used as a means of controlling leadership practice.

The 2009 BES publication was a synthesis of 134 studies, 61 of which were from New Zealand. A synthesis, the authors explain, is “not a neutral process of data collection – it is a sense making and interpretive exercise” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 6). Five dimensions of leadership were derived from a meta-analysis of direct evidence of leadership, and a further three dimensions from indirect evidence of leadership. By

dimension, the authors stated they meant “a broad set of leadership practices” (p. 94). The dimensions explained involved both managerial (organisational) and leadership (relational) tasks. A dichotomy between the two did not occur as both were involved (p. 94). The five dimensions identified were: establishing goals and expectations, resourcing strategically, planning, co-ordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum, promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment. Resourcing strategically meant securing resources, (staff, as well as material goods, and services) that “are aligned to pedagogical purposes, not securing resources per se” (p. 98). Resourcing strategically by itself could lead to restructuring of the school to make use of its best resources. This can be of critical importance for rural schools for whom resources remain a continuing challenge.

Robinson et al (2009) argued that dimensions which were closer to the core business of teaching and learning had a greater effect on student achievement than those more concerned with organisation. The fourth dimension, promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, showed a large effect of 0.84. The important difference in this crucial dimension was the active participation by the leader themselves, both as leader and as learner. Leaders’ participation and influence was both formal within structures such as staff meetings and professional development workshops, and informal, for example, conversations both within the classroom and outside the classroom, and spontaneous discussions about specific teaching problems. In addition to this the research synthesis derived three further dimensions from an analysis of indirect evidence of leadership; creating educationally powerful connections, engaging in constructive problem talk, and, selecting, developing, and using smart tools.

For rural schools particularly, creating educationally powerful connections is vital given both the smaller resource base available to them, and the smaller number of professional staff. Where schools have made connections within their communities, continuities are established between the students lived lives and school practices. Bishop, Berryman, Cavanaugh, Teddy, and Clapham (2006, cited in Robinson et al. 2009) claimed this connectedness for Māori was fundamental. Rural researchers would agree with this tenet. From these connections effective relationships both reflect and build shared understandings and goal commitment (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Fisk, 2002; Theobald, 1997; Wright, 2003, 2007). Creating these connections leads to professional learning communities, (communities of practice) both within and outside the school (Mulford, 2008; Zepeda, 2004).

Thrupp (2010) noted that while methodological rigour had been sought in the BES programme, “it was not immune to political bias” (p. 5). While the earlier quality teaching BES (Alton Lee, 2003) had been criticised for overemphasising a “politics of blame” where teachers were held responsible for underachievement, the Leadership BES tended to place too much emphasis on the effects of leadership for improving achievement he noted (Thrupp, 2010). He believed a more balanced view would have taken social structure into account. Despite its promise initially, Thrupp contends, the leadership BES moved too quickly to a “decontextualised problem solving orientation” which “falls away from academically searching and becomes more a policy document” (p. 7) and as a result loses its impact, at least for rural school leadership as the “lack of attention to context shows up repeatedly” (p.8). Notman (2010) found the absence of consideration of other types of leadership other than transformational and pedagogical

provided an unbalance in reporting “what works”. For rural school principals, contingent leadership, as found in Scottish and Australian research, constituted a major response to their particular context. Potaka (2010) argued that from the point of practising principals, the leadership BES “one size fits all”, presents a confusing picture, and indeed may draw some schools away from the good work they are already doing to raise achievement in an attempt to replicate the methods promoted here. There is an implicit assumption in the report that schools are not focusing on underachievement, whereas the reality is that most schools are.

The two key findings from research in all four countries were that context mattered (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; G. Collins, 2003; Southworth, 2002), with a more direct front line involvement of principals in smaller schools, and secondly, that the huge challenge of the dual role for teaching principals, where their preferred commitment to teaching was being compromised by the burden of increased administration as a direct result of moves towards self-management (Clarke et al., 2006; Dunning, 1993; Wilson & Brundrett, 2005). Researchers found that principals of rural schools in Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand not only faced competing demands at the chalkface between leadership and management, but another set of competing demands in their private lives. Many principals chose to live outside their immediate area as a response to a work/life balance, for example, 71% in Scotland (Wilson & McPake, 2000).

Overall, satisfaction with the job predominated and close connections with staff and communities was the norm in almost all areas except for Tasmania (Ewington et al., 2008) which proved to be the exception even from other areas of Australia. A differing experience for New Zealand principals from earlier research findings and from other

principals in the other countries was the perception of a wide variety of support, both prior and subsequent to appointment (Ewington et al., 2008, p. 24).

Like the rural context, there is a paucity of research both on small schools and on their leadership (Ewington et al., 2008; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Southworth, 2002; Wilson & McPake, 1998, 2000). Clarke & Wildy (2004) have argued that more qualitative studies are needed to give the thick descriptions which would capture the complexity of the leadership role, especially in different contexts such as rural. These qualitative studies in turn have their own critics who question areas of rigour and validity (see for example, Arnold et al, 2005). Other researchers have argued the pressing need for more research into both small and rural, for as Chalker (1999) postulated, “Small schools in rural communities offer a path to excellence that eludes others” (p. 5).

It is of major concern for rural education in New Zealand therefore, that a report to the Minister of Education, found that “research suggests that rural principalship is not seen as an attractive step of a career pathway, as it is not valued as experience for urban/non-teaching principal roles” (Education Workforce Advisory Group, 2010, p. 24). This followed on from a similar finding in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2007) report on improving school leadership in New Zealand “small school principalship today is regarded as more of a career stop than the career step it had traditionally been viewed” (p. 73).

Small schools have been criticised for claiming a special case in education with arguments made both for and against their continued existence. They are seen to be claiming both distinct qualities which set them apart from mainstream schools, and

distinct advantages for both students and staff, yet this contrasts with the lack of definition of what constitutes a small school (Philips, 1997).

Much research on small schools features a reliance on data collected by interviews with principals as targeted respondents. As such the principal may be “promotional” (Philips, 1997) rather than realistic in responses. Strict adherence to triangulation of data by interviews with other staff or community members and the use of public documents can remove some of this possibility as confirmatory data. However, these interviews often take place in the school in a relatively formal setting, allowing for the possibility of guarded responses, especially if the issues under discussion are emotive ones, for example, the effectiveness of the principal.

The necessity for vertically grouped classes, and the impact on principal practice in small schools has largely been ignored in research on small schools. Inevitably it must lead to differentiation in effective professional leadership practice and further research is called for.

2.5 Effective Leadership Practices

Decades of “effective school” research and demands for effective schools at all levels and sizes have placed a growing attention on the crucial role of school leaders and their professional practices. Harris, Moos, Moller, Robertson and Spillane (2006) offered their definition of professional practice as: “Leadership practice is part of the social world of the school and is intrinsically linked to the everyday interactions that take place there” (p. 4).

This section examines the evidence surrounding the identification of a core set of professional practices found in successful schools, regardless of size or location. Analysis of these “core practices” lead to the development of a number of questions for inclusion in the principal’s survey to be carried out as part of data collection for this study, focusing on the importance and occurrence of these “core practices” in principals’ lived experiences.

Internationally, school principals are increasingly being held accountable for educational quality in the belief that students’ success or failure is determined by the way a school is administered, and that the principals, either urban or rural, are linked to both overall students’ achievement, and/or, gains in that achievement through their professional leadership practices. There has been much debate and confusion surrounding what constitutes both successful leadership and professional leadership practices.

Leithwood et al., (2006a) maintained that:

One source of confusion in sorting out what we know about successful school leadership is that much of the educational leadership literature does not focus on actual leadership practices at all. It is about leaders’ values, beliefs, skills or knowledge . . . which, may be reputed as contributing to leader effectiveness by a range of people who experience leadership (p. 8)

One of the most pervasive results of this confusion and debate during a time of increased accountability in general, has been the almost global adoption of leadership standards (Leithwood, et al. 2006a). Almost all of these standards, in addition to identifying leadership practices, spell out long lists of knowledge, skills, and dispositions

that leaders should have, or acquire, on the assumption that they are needed for effective leadership practice. Gronn (2003c) argued that these are part of the politically attractive and regulatory “designer leadership” (p. 284). In addition, accountability contexts in recent years have led to what Thrupp (1998) called, “The politics of blame” (p. 196), which lead to schools and their leaders being held responsible for any downturn in achievement and/or national results in international competitions, whilst ignoring the effects of policies and economic strictures. What the politics of blame and the narrow focus on student outcomes as the measure of effective schools did was to “divert attention away from wider structural issues and political agendas or it failed to challenge retrogressive views of what education is or what schools might be for” (Riley & MacBeath, 2003, p. 178). In contrast, Leithwood et al. (2006) argued that the accumulated empirical evidence had a great deal to say about effective leadership practices, and by far the largest amount of this evidence is about the leadership practices of school principals or head teachers.

2.5.1 A core set of leadership practices.

A number of reviews of research have been carried out in the past two decades focusing on leadership, leadership practices and their effects on student achievement (Bell, Bolam & Cubillo, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1996a; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Waters et al., 2003). From this accumulated evidence, a core set of basic leadership practices have been identified that are thought to be valuable and used by successful leaders in almost all contexts (Hallinger and Heck, 1996a, 1998, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006b; Robinson, 2009). The four basic sets of leadership

practices have been identified as setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the instructional (teaching and learning) programme.

Context and circumstances mean that these practices are not constantly required, and some assume more importance at different times. But, as Leithwood and his associates have suggested, there is enough evidence about their value across enough different settings to consider them basic to successful leadership in all contexts (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Evidence from schools and other organisations pointed initially to three broad categories of basic leadership practices. However, intense interest in leadership and its effects on student achievement has led to a fourth category being included as part of core leadership practices, to take cognisance of the instructional component of the educational leader's role.

The four categories of leadership practices closely reflect a transformational approach to leadership (Harris, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), and are prominent in incorporating the essential factors of effective schools (Reynolds & Cuttance, 1992, Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000; Riley & Louis, 2000; Teddlie, Stringfield, & Reynolds, 2000), the characteristics of effective leaders (Brundrett & Burton, 2003; Goddard, 2003; Yukl, 1999) and form the basis for pedagogic leadership as outlined by MacNeill, Cavanagh & Silcox (2005). The 21 leadership responsibilities outlined by the Waters et al., (2003) meta analysis of research on the direct effects of leadership on academic achievement, and the evidence of five leadership dimensions found by Robinson (2007)

fit within these four categories, as do the eight forces of change identified by Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher (2005).

2.5.2 The four basic practices.

2.5.2.1 *Setting Directions.*

Leithwood et al. (2006a) theorised that this category of practices was important for motivating leaders' colleagues, and was about the establishment of moral purpose as a basic tenet (Fullan, 2003a; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). A critical aspect of this practice of leadership is the development of shared understandings about the organisation, and its activities and goals that can underpin a sense of purpose or vision (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Witziers, 2003). Specific practices that help set directions include identifying and articulating a vision through purposeful conversations, setting and fostering acceptance of group goals, and closely aligned with goals creating high performance expectations (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2006a; Witziers, Bosker & Kruger, 2003). Effective communication, writing formal statements and plans, and monitoring performance assist with establishing purpose and vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Silins & Mulford, 2002).

Robinson (2007) found that in schools with high achievement, goals were not only articulated by leaders but “embedded in school and classroom routines and procedures” (p. 6) alongside an implicit understanding that they would be accepted. Robinson et al. (2009) argued that evidence suggested the content of goals was as important as the process which sets them. The focus for goals should be on the educational content, and their alignment with desired student outcomes. For rural schools, setting directions

requires the involvement and input of not just the school community, but also the wider community if true ownership is to be established (Fisk, 2002; Wright, 2003).

Leithwood (2005), in summarising 63 case studies of successful principal leadership in seven different countries, found that the country reports described successful leaders using these core practices, but in ways particular to their own contexts. In the Northern European countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, for example, school direction discussions always incorporated democratic values. In the USA, direction setting was linked to accountability measures, and in Australia to life-long learning. Students' learning was central to the directions setting of all successful leaders in all countries. Much of this research was carried out in urban settings.

2.5.2.2 Developing People.

Building capacity is necessary for people to be able to productively move toward directions set by shared group goals and visions (Fullan et al., 2005; Gurr et al., 2005). The ability to build capacity in others requires leaders to have emotional intelligence, in order to devote personal attention to other staff, and to offer them intellectual stimulation (Golman, 1995, 1998). Based on a comprehensive review of literature, Leithwood et al. (2006a) argued that one probable way in which leadership impacted on student achievement was that it acted as a “catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organization” (p. 15). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) included under the developing people category practices such as providing individualised support, providing intellectual stimulation and modelling important values and practices.

Country reports analysed by Leithwood (2005) described how Australian principals supported staff in times of crisis, engaged with them in critical reflection practices, and acknowledged their achievements. American leaders, on the other hand, were found to mentor their colleagues as well as modelling for them both the values and instructional practices they considered productive for their schools. Leaders in Sweden and Denmark especially highlighted the accessibility and visibility of leaders that allowed for assistance when needed. Waters et al.'s (2003) review found evidence for understanding and valuing members of the school community as contributing to student achievement within the school, and to building further capacity in the organisation. The valuing of community members is an important consideration for rural schools.

The instructional leadership role subsumes both providing intellectual stimulation and providing an appropriate model – two of the practices which work towards developing people. Known more colloquially as “walking the talk”, it leads to establishing credibility of principals amongst staff particularly for teaching principals.

The considerable literature on instructional leadership assumes such practices on part of the school leaders, which places them at the centre of instructional improvement efforts in their schools regardless of school size (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000; Hallinger, 2003; Southworth, 2005; Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). Staff meetings, both formal and informal, conversations about teaching and learning, and taking part in workshops alongside teachers represented ways principals in high performing schools carried out these functions (Robinson et al., 2009).

There is now a greater emphasis and understanding that leadership is often shared by multiple individuals at different levels of the organisation (Gronn, 2003a; Harris, 2005; Harris & Day, 2003, Southworth, 2005). School leadership, it is argued, must be viewed as the cumulative activities of a broad set of leaders both formal and informal (including both teachers and students) within a school rather than just the work of formally designated leaders (Gronn, 2003a; Harris, et al., 2006; Leithwood & Steinbach, 2003; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001). The distributed leadership model has been found to be particularly pertinent for developing people practices. Distributed leadership served to provide motivation, intellectual stimulation, and a means of building capacity (Penlington, Kington & Day, 2008), and has been recognised as a way of encouraging cultures of collaboration. For rural schools it is a way of ensuring sustainability when staff move on (Fullan, 2005a).

2.5.2.3 Redesigning the Organisation.

Successful school leaders develop structures that support and sustain the performance of all teachers and students. The structures help to develop the school as an effective organisation, and provide an orderly and supportive environment (Cotton, 2000; Hobbs, 1995; Robinson et al., 2009). Research has identified specific practices that develop such structures as building collaborative school cultures (Bell & Harrison, 1998; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1997), restructuring (Davies & Davies, 2005; Fullan, 1993, 1999), and developing productive relations with parents and community as well as connecting the school to the wider community (Education Review Office, 2008a; Otero & West-Burnham, 2005; Robinson et al., 2009; Strike, 2008).

Davies and Davies (2005) found, along with other researchers (Bell & Harrison, 1998; Clarke, 2000; Fullan, 1999; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999), that for participation to occur in dialogue concerning long term issues, a change in culture or restructuring of the school was required (Davies & Davies, 2005). Restructuring also required the development of courage, trustful relationships, and time:

Leaders nurture mutual respect and trust among those involved in collaborating, by being trustworthy themselves Trust is increasingly recognized as a key element in encouraging collaboration and that individuals are more likely to trust those with whom they have established good relationships. (Leithwood et al., 2006a, pp. 39-40).

Decision making processes that allow and encourage participation strengthen trust and commitment both within the school and community, and help to build productive relationships with families and communities (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Education Review Office, 2008a; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). A perusal of rural communities have much to teach us in this regard. The increase in public accountability of schools to their communities through the widespread implementation of school-based management has made building productive relationships with families and communities a key practice for all principals in western countries (Wylie, 1997).

Knowledge sharing and collective identity strengthen the bonds developed between the school, the family, and the community, and extend to the wider district (Chance, 2002; Connelly, Clandinin & Ming, 1997; Robinson et al., 2009). This is the tri-level development advocated by Fullan (2003a) as part of the moral imperative of school

leadership and a familiar concept to rural researchers (see also rural research earlier).

Building productive relationships with families and communities is critical for West–Burnham who argued in 2002 that:

The focus of the education system in the future will have to be on community – the key determinant of educational success. This means that the definition of educational leadership has to switch from institutional improvement to community regeneration (para. 2).

2.5.2.4 Managing the instructional (teaching and learning) programme.

Principals have been shown to play key roles in instructional change in their schools, and their level of involvement often dictates whether attempts to change instruction succeed or failed (Riordan, 2003). “The closer leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely it is that they will have a positive impact on their students” (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 201). Specific leadership practices that have led to development of the core practice of “Managing the Instructional Programme”, include staffing the programme, providing instructional (teaching and learning) support, and buffering staff from distractions. As teaching principals, rural leaders are intimately involved in instructional change.

Staffing the programme was found by Robinson (2007), to be positively connected to student achievement. While this leadership practice had only a small impact on student outcomes, “resourcing the pursuit of goals is a condition for achieving them” (Robinson, et al., 2009, p. 203). Leithwood & Riehl (2003), posited that finding teachers with the interest and capacity to further the school’s efforts is the goal of this activity. In rural

New Zealand, as in other rural areas worldwide, Fisk (2002), determined this had the potential to be a very important leadership practice (Fisk, 2002; see also Why Rural Matters, 2007).

Providing instructional support by “planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum lies at the heart of pedagogical leadership” (Robinson, et al. 2009, p. 203) and the heart of the rural teaching principals’ role. Specific practices such as the monitoring of student achievement, purposeful use of data, evaluation of programmes, and teacher appraisal using student achievement data, indirectly lead to gains in student achievement (Bell et al., 2003; Waters et al., 2003).

2.5.2.5 The importance of basic practices.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argued that while mastery of the basic practices would not guarantee successful schools “lack of mastery likely guarantees failure. A successful leader needs to do more but cannot do less” (p. 21). However, in addition to engaging in the core set of leadership practices, they contended that successful school leaders must also engage in practices that acknowledge the preoccupation with accountability-oriented policy context in which they work. Leadership models such as entrepreneurial, strategic, and even learning-centred, were among those developed to shape leadership roles to answer the need. Leithwood (2005) asserted that “the country reports, in sum, enlighten us about how variations in the degree and form of accountability demanded by the policy context shape the enactment of practices used by successful principal leaders” (p. 623).

School leaders do not carry out these practices all the time. This is the contingency basis of leadership. There were differences in the degree of principals’ perceived

emphasis on the core practices and their enactment of them, dependent on context. Effective educational leaders were able to diagnose (needs), differentiate (in levels of importance and timing of strategies to meet these) and actively coordinate these strategies (Day, Leithwood & Sammons, 2008). A New Zealand school principal whose school had, for example, a negative ERO report, or in the United Kingdom a poor OFSTED report, would be more likely to present an already developed vision, rather than to spend more time to collaboratively develop the vision, so that the turnaround could be started immediately. The practice that has been identified as poor will be the focus of the turnaround, not necessarily the development of other leaders at this pointing time.

Hallinger (2003) suggested that principals in East Asia, in contrast to principals in western countries, carried out leadership practices in a different manner even when the practices, for example, setting goals, may seem similar (p. 1004). Dimmock (2003) agreed, suggesting “the indomitable fact is that leadership is cultural-bound [and therefore also context bound] to an extent that cannot, or should not be ignored . . . yet it has been largely ignored in education” (p.6). Leithwood et al. (2006a) argued that it is the enactment of the core practices that must be sensitive to values and context, not the core values themselves.

2.5.3 Leadership and school effects.

There is now a general consensus that leadership matters (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Robinson et al, 2009). However, empirical evidence in support of the assumption that leadership matters in terms of student achievement has, Leithwood and Day (2008) contend, “been slow to accumulate” (p. 1). Robinson et al. (2009) explained, “the

literature on leadership is substantial, but only a small part of it focuses on the relationship between leadership and student outcomes” (p. 35).

Coleman et al, (1966) were the first to study the association between school inputs and student achievement, using national samples of elementary and secondary students in the USA. One of the key findings of the Coleman report was that socio-economic factors were of much more significance in accounting for achievement than variations in school characteristics. The Coleman report generated a wide-ranging series of studies to further assess the effects of schools on student achievement. This, combined with the need for accountability, led to a growing body of research on leadership effects. From this era of school effectiveness/school improvement research, Miller and Rowan (2006) argued that, “the most pressing indicator of school effectiveness [was] - students’ growth in academic achievement” (p. 221). It became a widespread belief amongst policy-makers and practitioners worldwide that the quality of leadership within a school had an important impact on raising pupil achievement (Brown, Anfara, Hartman, Mahar, & Mills, 2002; Department of Education and Skills (DfES), 2005; Education Review Office, 1999, 2001).

However, this widely held belief has had limited support from academic research and writing in general, where the “nature, focus and effect of leaders’ actions are either contested or unclear” (Bell et al., 2003, p. 4). In New Zealand, Robinson et al. (2009) found as late as 2009 that, “there is little New Zealand research that directly links school leadership with student outcomes” (p. 37). However, there are so many variables influencing student outcomes and that is why it is so difficult to isolate any particular one.

School leadership effects research tended to have followed three main models: the direct-effects model; a mediated-effects framework, which hypothesised that leaders achieve their effect on school outcomes through indirect paths mediated by other people, events, and organisational factors as for example, teacher commitment and/or instructional practices (Bell et al, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005); and, a reciprocal effects framework where the leader acts on mediating factors if and when appropriate to induce greater effects. The reciprocal effects framework, Mulford, Silins, and Leithwood (2004) and Southworth (2002) would argue, is the most powerful model for investigating leadership effects.

Several reviews of leadership effects research were conducted in the decade from 1996 to 2006, most notably Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b, 1998). (See also Leithwood, Seachore, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Witziers et al., 2003). All of the reviews found that school leadership had a sometimes small but significant effect on pupil outcomes, and that these effects were usually indirect effects through impacting on mediating factors such as teacher motivation, capacity, and work settings. However, the use of hard data to influence and narrow measures such as test scores, used in much of the research on leadership effects have been criticised by a number of researchers. Such narrow measures do not take into account leadership effects on other variables, such as school engagement and motivation (Barker, 2007; Silins & Mulford, 2003). Furthermore, Barker (2007) claimed an unrelenting preoccupation with test measures condition leaders to seek short-term gains rather than those promoting deeper learning because “when instructional leaders do encourage breadth and depth of learning, the expected improvement may not appear in the performance data” (p. 38).

The reviews found that unless school leaders recognised whether their influence was direct or indirect and how much of an effect it had, their contribution to student achievement could be negative (Barker, 2007; Waters et al., 2003). Some school

leadership practices advocated by policy makers and enforced by compliance measures, such as those pertaining to administration, or mandating set curriculum time per week have not been evidenced to contribute to student achievement (Barker, 2007; Bell & Rowley, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Mulford et al. 2004).

Methodological problems have meant that results of research in leadership practices from these reviews have often been inconclusive and not generalisable to other contexts. Most large scale reviews such as those undertaken within the decade from 1996 – 2006, and now beyond, satisfied questions calling for longitudinal research as opposed to one off case studies. In a search for increased validity, several reviews incorporated more than one source of information about educational leaders' practices. Waters, Marzano, & McNulty (2005) included a survey of principals as well as the combined evidence from the 39 studies they reviewed. Several of the studies in the reviews included questionnaires of both teachers and community groups' perceptions of leaders' practices, using measures such as the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMS) developed by Hallinger and Murphy (1985). However, time and economic constraints meant that data about leadership practices were rarely empirically based.

Likert scales as a response within the questionnaires or surveys were used for a number of studies within the reviews, and while these give an indication of level of support for the question that can then be summed and averaged, whether this information is rigorous enough is open to question (Achyar, 2008).

Response rates to surveys and questionnaires as used in studies in the reviews have been found to be low in times of increased intensification, and, sample sizes are often questionable in most original leadership research. This may lead to a bias of samples in who actually returns the survey or questionnaire. The returns, for example, may only reflect institutions that are undergoing intensified scrutiny as a result of a poor report from outside agencies, or it may reflect those whose leadership extends pressure to

complete the surveys. Many of the studies surveyed as part of the extensive reviews were undertaken during a time of increased intensification which occurred during the 1990s and into the early years of the 21st century.

Not all classroom practices led to greater pupil learning. In line with other research (Waters et al., 2003). Leithwood and Jantzi (2006), found the type of classroom practice that was changed was crucial. The “potency of leadership for increasing student learning hinges on the specific classroom practices which leaders stimulate, encourage, and promote” as part of their leadership practices (p. 223). Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) directly attributed a lack of improved achievement in UK schools to the prescriptive nature of the classroom practices promulgated by the National Literacy Strategy and the National Numeracy Strategy. The “one way” accountability of government was clearly unethical in their view, in that school leaders had control over the implementation of classroom practices, but not of the practices themselves (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Potentially, they concluded, policy makers were putting reform measures in jeopardy by mandating prescribed and preferred local action, and then providing serious incentives and sanctions for compliance at a time when empirical evidence to help guide efforts was sadly lacking (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

In New Zealand, which has tended to follow the path of the UK in policy implementation and accountability systems, the same criticisms can be levelled. Attempts to prescribe the number of hours (at least for children in the first three years at school) for numeracy and literacy have resulted in a marginalising of other curriculum areas such as the arts and social studies. Accountability measures like those in the UK, especially those that are standards based, have not decreased and their one size fits all policy fails to take into account context, school mix, and other crucial variables. Both Thrupp (1999) and Scheerens (1992) argued, like the original 1966 Coleman Report, that student background strongly conditioned results. “Policy makers should begin to distinguish between

measured performance in tests and other kinds of knowledge, understanding, skills and development” (Barker, 2007, p. 39; see also Mulford et al., 2004). The new “National Standards” is a case in question in New Zealand, as is the recently imposed calls for “personalised learning” where both of these concepts have limited consensus or understanding.

A reliance on narrow measures such as test scores undermines much of the potential results of the research on leadership effects (Barker, 2007; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Mulford et al. 2004). A criticism has been that governments in many western countries have advocated leadership models that are essentially incomplete and unproven, but demand transformation in schools and results on narrowly defined and difficult to influence outcomes (Mulford et al. 2004; Scheerens, 1992).

2.5.3.1 Leadership effects in small schools.

Rural schools’ leaders have the potential to make direct contributions to student achievement through first order changes and through their own teaching practices (Cotton, 1996, 2001; Southworth, 2002). Southworth’s head teachers provided concrete evidence of their ideas in action, and as such they became particularly potent leaders (Southworth, 2002).

Southworth’s assumptions gain credence in light of research on rural schools carried out in the USA (Cotton, 2001; Israel & Bealieu, 2002; Jimmerson, 2006; Nachtigal, 1994; Zhou & Kim, 2006). Much of this research points to the positive relationships found between rural schools, and a range of factors, such as student motivation and engagement, which while not determining student achievement, certainly have proved to be influential in school improvement.

Educational leadership is complex, messy, contingent, and inter-relational. Despite years of research and academic investigation, the understanding of (and evidence for), effects of leadership on, and the most effective practices for school improvement and student achievement, are not well understood (Barker, 2007; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Mulford et al., 2004; Witziers et al., 2003). More rigorous longitudinal research, both qualitative and quantitative and including international comparisons and differing contexts, has been called for by a number of researchers (Day et al., 2008; Fullan, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Mulford et al., 2004; Southworth, 2002) especially given the re-emphasis on school leadership by policy makers in most western countries.

Underachievement of students and lack of motivation have led most western nations to undergo a prolonged period of curriculum reorganisation in an attempt to make curriculum more authentic in their respective educational systems. New Zealand is no exception, and is in the early stages of new curriculum implementation following a number of years devoted to the Curriculum Project.

2.5.4 Curriculum and community.

For rural schools, community and curriculum are as interrelated as school and community. Miller (1995) identified the community as curriculum approach as a means through which strong relationships between schools and communities can be built. Otero and West-Burnham (2005) agreed, and argued that school and community leaders must learn how to develop a community-based and community driven curriculum focusing on building strong partnerships with parents, businesses, and the community as a whole.

3.5.4.1 Curriculum coherence and design.

Regardless of theoretical orientation, curriculum writers advocate the necessity of curricular coherence. Robinson et al. (2009) found coherence and continuity of teaching programmes to be critical for high performing New Zealand schools. For rural schools it is the coherence and seamlessness which comes as part of making the “out of classroom” learning environment consistent with what is taught within the school curriculum:

One aspect of coherence is that what is planned should be created (delivered) and that what has been created should be understood (received). A second requires that curriculum content, organisation, learning and teaching strategies, and assessment arrangements dovetail with one another. It is increasingly appreciated that non-formal learning is very important and that it is wise to try and make the out-of-classroom learning environment consistent with in-class activities, and to aim for a seamless environment in which learning happens, formally and informally.

(Knight, 2001, p. 370)

Curriculum planning and design are essential preliminary ingredients in the curriculum development process, and as such have become an area of focus for all New Zealand principals. From its inception in 1992, the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) has encouraged schools to develop a curriculum which meets the needs of their particular students and communities. This intent was made much clearer in the latest New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), which included a designing and planning section that provided guidance for schools working with their communities to design their own unique curriculum.

Curriculum planning involves a broad analysis of curriculum intent and context, conceptualising the design, organising the sequencing of developmental tasks, and arranging for the process of implementation and evaluation (Print, 1993). Curriculum design on the other hand refers to the arrangement of elements of the curriculum. It can be seen that unlike the belief of many teacher's the two work together. "Curriculum is more than just content. It can be defined as a set of purposeful, intended experiences. It may be divided into at least four parts: content, organisation, learning and teaching methods, and assessment" (Knight, 2001, p. 369). It is the purposeful, intended experiences from a rural context which are of relevance for rural principals in developing a school based curriculum to suit the needs of their learners.

2.5.5 School-based curriculum development.

Bolstad (2005) has argued that school-based curriculum development (SBCD) was a response which reflected the disenchantment in many countries with a centrally-developed curriculum, which it was felt could not meet the learning needs of students in rapidly changing and diversifying social environments. At the same time, there was a parallel trend in these countries to decentralise school governance and management. Many educationalists felt that a centralised curriculum gave governments some form of control over schools as schools increasingly took over the responsibility for their operation (Codd, 1990). In New Zealand this resulted in the development of the NZCF (Ministry of Education, 1993) with its rolling inception of legally compliant curriculum statements from 1992. However, the *Curriculum Stocktake Report* (Ministry of Education, 2002) recommended a reversal of the then current situation in that they argued for the legal status of the curriculum statements to become, instead, support materials. In

this way the curriculum statements, instead of demanding ‘coverage’, could be used as tools for schools “to craft curricula in ways that best meet their students’ needs and the educational aspirations of the school and its community” (Bolstad, 2005, p. 197).

Bolstad (2005) listed a number of possible stimuli for SBCD. Some, such as a desire to reflect the values of the school or the school community, and a perception that the existing school curriculum is not meeting the needs of all or some students, are reflected in the new NZC.

According to the NZC (2007):

Curriculum is designed and interpreted in a three-stage process: as the national curriculum, the school curriculum, and the classroom curriculum. The national curriculum provides the framework and common direction for schools, regardless of type, size, or location. It gives schools the scope, flexibility, and authority they need to design and shape their curriculum so that teaching and learning is meaningful and beneficial to their particular communities of students. In turn, the design of each school’s curriculum should allow teachers the scope to make interpretations in response to the particular needs, interests, and talents of individuals and groups of students in their classes. (p. 37)

Other stimuli, Bolstad (2005) suggested, were new theories or research about teaching and learning, new technologies, and more importantly for rural schools, a desire to draw on unique local knowledge, resources, or environments. This has led to the development in many rural areas of a “local curriculum,” which emphasized using the

community itself as the basis for curriculum content and community members as resident experts (Wright, 2003, 2007).

2.5.5.1 Community as curriculum.

A local curriculum that encompasses knowledge of local history and an appreciation of the local area is an intrinsic responsibility of rural schools to ensure sustainability of their communities (Wright 2003). Beckner (1996) explained this as “the curriculum thus encompasses the community, and the community becomes a major part of the curriculum” (p. 964). Stability and continuity are established by integrating the past with the present experiences of rural students. Epstein’s (1991) theory of overlapping spheres of influence identified the community as one of the primary contexts in which children learn, and argued that schools, families and communities must work collaboratively to ensure the academic success and emotional well-being of all students. Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) saw local knowledge as crucial to recreating communities and curriculum to meet their learners’ needs:

Understanding one’s place is critical to this recreation. It ought to be the chief curricular focus in schools for several reasons. Knowledge of place—where you are and where you come from—is intertwined with knowledge of self. Place holds the promise of contributing to the development of meaningful identity. Focusing on place, using the community as a curricular lens, not only contributes to recreating community, but it will also help realize true school renewal. (p. 134)

Place-based education is a relatively new term for community as curriculum, appearing only recently in educational literature (Woodhouse & Knapp 2000). However,

progressive educators have promoted the concept for close to 100 years. Dewey (1915), for example, advocated for an experiential approach to student learning in the local environment. He claimed that social situations fostered by active community membership, together with educational experiences within a community, were crucial to the very best kinds of learning (Dewey, 1915).

This involvement and immersion in a community promote a constructivist approach to teaching and learning, advocated by the NZC and other western curricula. “Today, constructivism has become the ‘in’ foundational theory for curriculum and instruction” (Bentley, 2003, cited in Pegues, 2007, p. 316). For community as curriculum, this means that students, immersed in the context of community, *construct* important meanings and understandings through interaction with that community environment. Constructivist educators contend that the background knowledge, previous experiences, and fundamental world-view of students profoundly affect their interpretation of subject matter in the school curriculum (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Grumet, 1988). It is logical to conclude then, that a rich foundation of experiences and knowledge within a cohesive community is crucial for children to learn and construct meaning about the important social values and mores of the community (Theobald & Curtiss, 2000, p. 107).

Community-based curricula provide a natural setting replete with authentic and meaningful problems that draw on prior experiences and intrinsically motivate students to solve them (Theobald & Curtiss, 2000). Part of the intrinsic nature of the motivation stems from what appear to be a cross-cultural human desire to make a contribution to others. To be motivated learners, Theobald and Curtiss (2000) contend, “children need to see—concretely and immediately—the relevance of their efforts and the good that results from those efforts. Learners need the community to provide this sort of relevance” (pp. 108-109). The power of a community-based curriculum is illustrated by the famous and longstanding Foxfire project in rural Rabun Gap, Georgia (Mendonca, 2005). The

project, in existence for more than 25 years, got its start when students recorded oral histories from elders in the area and published them, first in a magazine, and then as books. Some of the books have been best sellers and the proceeds have been used to create a huge endowment for the project.

Place-based (or community as curriculum) education shares commonalities of approach with outdoor education and environmental education (terms more familiar in New Zealand and Australia), but has five essential characteristics that differentiate it from these other approaches. Woodhouse and Knapp (2000) defined these characteristics as: emerging from particular attributes of a place (content specific), inherently multidisciplinary, experiential—action must be a component if ecological and cultural sustainability are to result, reflective of an educational philosophy that is broader than “learn to earn” and connects place with self and community.

Theobald and Nachtigal (1995) have argued that this connection between self and community is important, and even though their research was undertaken over a decade ago, it is still as relevant today:

The more students understand their community and its environs—its social structure, its economy, its history, its music, its ecology—the more they become invested in that community. Such investment increases the likelihood that they will find ways to either stay in or return to the community. The significance here is not just that one small place is saved, but that the character of our national culture is transformed in the process. Indeed, the promise of rural educational renewal is that it can start us all on the road to a more sustainable future. (p. 134)

In the United States, support for place-based education, particularly in rural areas, is widespread and long-standing, with the ongoing Foxfire projects from the 1970s the

most well known. White and Read (2008) have argued that place-based education needs to be part of teacher training. “Place conscious pedagogies open a way for all teacher education institutions to address the needs of rural schools and their communities” (p. 1-2).

Rural communities typically have a proclivity for caring for their environment. In many rural schools in New Zealand, education for sustainability is a strong component in the local curriculum. Working with, and within the local natural environment heightens communities’ perceptions of school as benefiting children and the local area (Wright 2003, 2007). Effective rural schools fit the community and are consistent with the characteristics of rural life so that events pertinent to rural areas are incorporated within the classroom environment, and related curriculum is used to support these events (Beckner 1996; Wright, 2003). The imposition of National Standards has the potential to negate the effect of this curriculum. Stapleton (2010) is vehement:

If the National Standards policy gains precedence over the local curriculum opportunity then there is no doubt that rural schools will ultimately end up with an urban oriented teaching and learning programme. It will be to the rural community’s disadvantage if the curriculum is no longer locally, and culturally relevant. (p. 10)

Rural communities need a vision for the future. If a future world is not envisioned, children are condemned to a future that looks backward. Vision arises from a synthesis of past experience, professional knowledge and expertise, recognising and capitalising on present circumstances and encompassing future possibilities (Wright 2003). The current

emphasis on an “inquiry” approach to learning fits in well with providing vision and in addition “using the local community as curriculum is consistent with the inquiry approach” (Stapleton, 2010, p. 11).

Vision by itself is not enough, however. Selecting optimal times for community projects and integrative curriculum placement of them in developing the community as curriculum are important roles of rural schools, for developing strong and enduring community and school relationships (Wright, 2007).

2.6 Community and School Relationships

Although rural schools may be a major repository of learning resources, they are not the sole repository. Rural residents have considerable expertise in rural life and work, adapting to changing times and changes in community life over the years. Both the school and the community gain from leveraging resources (T. Collins, 2001). Community as curriculum enhances both this connection and ongoing relationships schools have with their communities (Theobald & Curtiss, 2000). SBCD provides a further relational base for involving community in the school’s development of curriculum, particularly if one of the stimuli for SBCD has been the desire to draw on unique local knowledge and expertise.

The importance of the link between schools and community for rural development was attested to by Collins (2001) and Kilpatrick, Barrett and Johns (2003); the vitality of the link for re-energising rural communities by Chance (1999) and Wright (2003, 2007); and its importance in support of student achievement by Barley and Beesley (2007),

Mulford and Silins (2003) and a number of researchers taking part in the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSP) (Ewington et al., 2008; Gurr et al., 2005).

Researchers have identified three distinctive yet related approaches that can build strong relationships between schools and communities. The first approach uses the school as a community center. The school becomes a resource for lifelong learning, and a vehicle for delivering a wide range of services. A second approach uses the community as curriculum, emphasizing the study of community in all its complexity. The third approach, school-based enterprise (SBE), emphasises schools as developers of entrepreneurial skill and as partners in community development. As “budding” entrepreneurs, students identify potential service needs in their rural communities and establish a business to address those needs (Miller, 1995). This approach has been developed in New Zealand under the auspices of the Business Development Society.

Whatever the approach used, valuable school – community linkages are based on collaboration and active engagement of parents and constituencies from throughout the school and the community. Effective school community linkages also extend beyond the immediate community to agencies and organisations in the wider district, with mutual educational interests, as for example, universities and colleges (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009).

Rural schools, working in partnership with local leaders and residents, can have a positive impact on community viability (Wright, 2007). This is especially true when students working alongside adults have opportunities to engage in meaningful community-based learning that both serves the community and addresses their learning

needs. The recent example in Central Otago of the success of “Shrek” the hermit sheep is a prime example. By building on the social capital present in youth and schools, the community helps to develop responsible citizens for today and skilled leaders for tomorrow (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk and Mulford, 2002; Miller, 1995). The overall challenge for both community leaders and leaders of rural schools will be that they will not succeed if they employ “go it alone” strategies. It is only by cultivating collaborative co-operation with each other that rural areas and their schools will be able to both prosper and become truly sustainable. Harmon and Schafft (2009) have argued for collaboration that extends beyond a focus just on student achievement. The priorities of ensuring academic success of students and the social and economic vitality of their communities should not be mutually exclusive, but instead should be “deeply and indeed inextricably connected” (p. 8). The purpose of schools, Otero and West-Burnham (2005) reiterated, is to help families and communities educate young people. “Schools need to be successful with their communities, not in spite of them” (p.19).

Making connections is not just about community development, it is also part of good pedagogy. “Evidence from a variety of contexts show that effectively integrating community resources into lessons can lead to major gains in achievement, enhanced learner identities, reduced disparities across different curriculum areas” (Robinson et al. 2009, p. 169). Ensuring that policies and practices promote productive parent and community involvement and good teacher-parent relationships is an important leadership responsibility.

A number of factors influence the school-community relationship, including the sense of shared community within the school (Amit, 2002; Lambert, 2002) the

development of a strong community support base (Epstein, 1995; Johns et al. 2002; Kilpatrick et al., 2003; Miller, 1995) and the flow of communication between the school and community (Education Review Office, 2008c; Robinson, et al, 2009). Johns et al. (2002) found that school-based interactions in many rural communities through which relationships are built up with others in the community, and networks established and maintained, often revolved around four major ongoing school activities: fundraising for the school and local charities; sporting activities; cultural activities which act as important catalysts in building and strengthening networks, and in affirming a sense of community identity; and formal and informal community involvement in school operations and management that ranged from parent help in classrooms to membership on BOT and other governing boards to “school-gate” interactions. The recognition of the reciprocal nature of the relationship was important, they postulated (Johns et al., 2002). ERO’s report on *Partners in Learning: Good Practice* (Education Review Office, 2008b) concluded that successful engagement of both school community and the wider community was largely influenced by the schools being “of their community” and not just “in their community” (p. 31). Their accompanying report *Partners in Learning: Schools’ Engagement with Parents, Whanau and Communities* (Education Review Office, 2008c) provides a useful list of indicators for school self review of how well they are achieving.

School leadership that facilitated these occurrences and encouraged participative decision making increased the sense of community ownership of the school and overall strengthened the relationships themselves (Johns et al., 2002, p. 6).

2.7 Conclusions

Rural schools are not only economically viable for the role they play in cementing diverse communities into cohesive, potentially powerful units of economic and social importance, but they can also be educationally viable, even desirable, as a blueprint for education for implementing new curriculum and/or innovative changes. The numerical significance of rural schools in a number of countries suggests this is a vital but neglected area of historical and contemporary research.

Research findings point to the sustainability and effectiveness of small rural schools as being more of a combination of factors of effective leader, sympathetic curriculum and interrelationship with the community, than any one single factor.

Rural schools have an unrecognised yet vital role in re-energising small communities through the development of social capital, and in sustainability through developing measures that ensure retention of youth, and social and economic development for their local community.

If rural schools are to be an integral part of their community, as research suggests (eg , Beaulieu, 2005; Chalker, 1999; Collins, 2001), they have to work assiduously at developing partnerships with their communities. Researchers have found a number of ways this has been achieved successfully by leveraging resources, but a solution needs to be found for the prevailing problem in rural communities of finding and retaining quality staff – none more so than the principal.

A number of researchers called for a deeper understanding of the element of the time, to both establish a new principal in their role in rural areas and to be able to develop effective relationships through trust.

Despite the rather intuitive sense that contexts do influence leadership practices, little research has attempted to identify the effects of different organisational and environmental contexts on principal behaviors and conduct. Contemporary research suggests (see, e.g., Clark & Wildly, 2004; Southworth, 2002) that context does in fact matter, and that successful small school leadership is qualitatively different. Pedagogic leadership is crucial in small schools but size, context and contiguity are all important mediators. The dual role of management and leadership, particularly in rural schools, continues to be problematic for principals who have a sense of always “juggling” their time between the two. A number of researchers have called for more in depth studies from the “inside” to understand the complexities of the roles of particularly teaching rural principals.

The effectiveness of schools is influenced in direct measure by the effectiveness of the principal. However, it is the *affective* relationship of an effective, or conversely ineffective principal, within a school and its community which is a crucial factor in the success or otherwise of small schools. Research has found that the type of affective relationship requisite in small schools between a professional leader and the community emphasises certain common characteristics and types of professional practice than others.

A number of core categories of professional practices have been found by researchers to be used by successful leaders in nearly all contexts regardless of size or location. The contingency basis of leadership dictated the timing and emphasis on each.

Creating and instigating an effective and sympathetic curriculum based on the community and environs has the potential, researchers believe, to ensure sustainability of both school and community. They have argued that the connection between self and community is as important and relevant today as it ever was, and that this connection can be achieved through understanding about their community within a place-based curriculum. How this curriculum is developed and established is important in the present New Zealand climate of school-based curriculum development.

Effective leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of achieving schools. This demand for quality leaders is particularly pertinent for rural schools, which by their very nature demand the best of educational leaders for the best of educational returns – viable, vital and sustainable communities.

The aim of this research is to make a significant contribution to the current knowledge about rural schools in general, the successful practices of effective rural principals, and the context they work in. The paucity of research in the particular contexts of small schools and rural schools has been attested to by a number of well-known international researchers. A comparison of the observed and documented practices of principals of small, and larger rural schools in the New Zealand scene will significantly contribute to the debate about differentiated practices of educational leadership in different contexts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional practices of principals of rural schools in the province of Otago, New Zealand, and the interrelationships that facilitate the creation and maintenance of an effective small or rural school. Four research questions were selected for the study, as follows:

1. To what extent is effectiveness in rural schools a function of interactions within the system (context); that is, the interrelated dimensions of the principal and their leadership, the school and its adopted curriculum, and the context of the wider community?
2. What are the professional practices identified as being effective by rural primary principals in Otago?
3. What professional practices are recognised by rural principals as being most effective for developing partnerships with their communities? How are these put into effect?
4. What professional practices and processes have successful rural principals found to be most effective for implementing a “local” curriculum? What has been the effect of implementing just such a curriculum?

This chapter presents the methodology for the study, the method of data collection, and the data analysis for the investigative phases that comprised the study. The remainder of the chapter is organised according to the following headings: Seeking Permission to Conduct The Study; Research Design; Theoretical Framework; Defining the Population; Data Gathering Instruments Selected for the Study; Development and Design of the Data Gathering Instruments; Trialing the Data Gathering Instruments; Administration of the Data Gathering Instruments; Data Recording and Data Analysis;

Validity; Reliability; and, Triangulation.

3.1 Seeking Permission to Conduct the Study

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Otago University College of Education Ethics Committee as a Category B application. Permission was also obtained by the principals of the participating rural schools in Otago. In New Zealand, permission to undertake research in a school is the prerogative of the principal. Formal written approval is not required from the New Zealand Ministry of Education.

3.2 Research Design

The research design comprised a mixed method, involving a survey and an instrumental, collective case study with a two-phase implementation over multi-sites. The mixed method approach is both practicable and appropriate for the design of this study. This approach presents a number of advantages over either quantitative or qualitative designs alone, not least being that it bridges the gap between quantitative and qualitative studies, attempting to utilise the strengths and compensate for the weaknesses of each, thus offering the empirical precision and descriptive precision described by Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007). Furthermore, mixed methods present findings that are transferable, rejecting the idea that social research tends to have findings that are applicable to every culture and circumstance, yet equally contesting the likelihood of research being so context-bound that its findings cannot be related to other situations in some way (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007)

Based on the premise that a research design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods is best placed to answer the research questions by offering both an

accurate overview and individual detail, two questions originally posed by Morgan, (1988) and examined and cited by Bryman (2001) needed to be considered at the outset. The first question was whether the design would favour a dominant paradigm (qualitative or quantitative); it did not. Hammersley (1996) argued for the *complementarity* of the two approaches when two different sets of data are employed to address different but complementary aspects of an investigation; for example qualitative data such as the semi-structured interviews was used to understand the social processes of effective rural leadership, while quantitative data from the survey sent to all rural principals was used to examine associations and their statistical generalisability to rural schools in other areas of New Zealand and elsewhere. Bryman (2001) argued that in practice, the weight given to each approach was not always able to be identified, whereas more recently, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), have argued that the weight given to each approach is not fully evident until the study is completed. However, in this research design, equal emphasis was placed on both to bring about a synthesis in the findings. Both quantitative and qualitative strands remained of equal importance throughout, despite initial recognition that as the study developed and data were analysed, it was likely that one strand may have become more significant than the other.

The second question asked by Morgan (1988), related to the order of data collection; in this study, the quantitative survey was followed by observations and qualitative semi-structured interviews. This allowed a broader picture to be formed at the outset to permit the identification of issues for further in-depth exploration in the second phase of observations and semi-structured interviews.

3.2.1 Quantative phase.

A mixed methods methodology and philosophy allowed the use of a non-experimental, ex post facto design to measure key factors of importance that have been identified in the research literature (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). This applied to the survey, the aim of which was to identify and describe relevant characteristics of the person or group involved in the research study, through the frequency of their responses to pre-set categories (Burns, 2000).

3.2.2 Qualitative phase.

The research design incorporated an instrumental collective case study to complement and potentially critically examine the survey findings.

Case study methodology is distinguished by its attempt to examine, “contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context . . . and the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1981, p. 59). “Case studies differ from experiments, which attempt to divorce the phenomena from its context” (Burns, 1997, p. 364). This was important for this study, in which the data relied on gathering information from real life situations as opposed to an experimental design.

Stake (1995) emphasized the importance of setting the parameters of a case study, pointing out that it must have “boundedness” and be an “integrated system” (p. 2). For a case study, “the first criterion should be to maximise what we can learn” (Stake, 2000, p. 448). By defining the parameters the data gathering becomes focused. In this research, a case study approach was chosen because the subject of the study – principals in rural schools in Otago – was considered a *bounded system*, an entity in itself. Therefore, this

case study was bounded in two ways: the system of rural principals, and the area of the Otago Province, New Zealand.

Practical considerations and the fact that the research involved rural principals meant that the research conducted was a *purposefully* or analytically selected case study. A case may be also purposefully selected in virtue of being, for instance, information-rich, critical, revelatory, unique, or extreme (as opposed to cases selected within a representational sample strategy used in correlational research). “Potential for learning is a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness” (Stake, 2000, p. 446). If a case is purposefully selected, then there is an interest in generalising the findings to the parent population. A purposefully selected case study is an instrumental study rather than intrinsic study, and is a case study which is both descriptive and explanatory. Case studies may be selected because of an interest in the case itself. When this is so it is an *intrinsic* case. Where the interest is in an issue, it becomes an *instrumental* case, and where multiple case are described and compared to provide insights into an issue, they become a collective instrumental case study (Stake, 1995).

The intention of this study was to collect, organise and summarise information/data about how principals of rural schools: practised leadership within their school; developed relationships within their school communities, the wider district and within clusters of other schools; interacted with their communities; and designed and implemented new curriculum within their school, in order to create and sustain an effective rural school.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study was constructivist and interpretational.

A constructivist framework points to meanings being understood and developed through social experiences, constructions, and interactions. Constructivism is defined through relativism (i.e., reality is locally constructed and co-constructed [by participants and researcher], the epistemology is transactional (i.e., co-created [by participants and researcher], and the methodology is hermeneutical (i.e., the investigator's experiences and bias impacts the research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Constructions would involve "thick descriptions," and interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case, that is, the rural principals. The term "thick descriptions" was first used by Ryle (1949) and later by Geertz (1975) who applied it in ethnography. In this study, "thick description" is used in the manner described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), as a way of achieving a type of external validity. Barker (2006) argued that it was doubtful whether we could hope to understand the complexity and subtlety of leadership and change without a close-up perspective that enabled thick descriptions to be written in such a way that the descriptive material would be sufficiently rich to permit subsequent re-interpretations. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people (Barker, 2006).

An interpretational framework recognises that "researchers may rely on intuition with many important criteria not specified and is atuned to the fact that research is researcher-subject interaction" (Stake, 1995, p. 47). "A number of school case studies," Barker (2006) contended, "depend on our willingness to accept the personal perspective of the author and its impact on data gathering, the provisional nature of truth and the imperfections of historical reconstruction" (p. 280). Therefore an interpretational

framework is appropriate for this study because the personal perspective of the researcher as an experienced rural principal was considered an important factor, with an impact both in the data gathering phase and the interpretational data analysis phase.

3.4 Defining the Population

The target population for the survey (the quantitative phase) was all principals of rural primary schools within the province of Otago, New Zealand. The target population comprised originally 73 schools. However, four schools were on the outskirts of a city and so considered themselves as predominantly suburban; these four schools were excluded.

Amenability to research access considered by Cousin (2005) to be as important as representative sampling meant that for the purpose of this study, purposive sampling was chosen for the qualitative observations and follow up interviews with the six selected principals who had participated in the first phase of the data collection. These interviewees were not intended to be randomly sampled, but selected through a purposive sampling procedure, employed to ensure that, as far as possible, they reflected the composition, size and geographical spread of rural schools in the three defined areas of Otago: East Otago, Central Otago, and South Otago. For these reasons, a principal from a large and small school in each of the three areas was selected.

3.5 Data Gathering Instruments Selected for the Study

Four data gathering instruments were selected for the study comprising:

1. A survey of all principals;

2. Observations of selected principals, carried out within the principals' school over a period of several days;
3. Semi-structured, follow up interviews after the observations were carried out; and,
4. Document analysis.

Each of these will be described in turn.

3.5.1 Survey.

A survey is a research tool that enables a researcher to gather data from a large population relatively easily and, according to Burns (1997) is, “an obvious one to adopt” particularly “if the population is scattered geographically” (p. 469). Mertens (1998) identified the ability to collect detailed information and the method allowing time for reflection before responding as a further advantage.

Disadvantages of surveys cited by Mertens (1998) were frequent low response rates and an inability to seek, or probe for, explanatory answers of any depth as compared to interviews or face to face meetings. Response rates to surveys and questionnaires have been found to be low in times of increased intensification (such as that experienced by most western education systems in the wake of devolution of management, or more simply, an impending visit from an auditory authority), and, sample sizes are often questionable in most original leadership research. This may lead to a bias of samples in who actually returns the survey or questionnaire. The returns, for example, may only reflect institutions, which are undergoing intensified scrutiny as a result of a poor report from outside agencies, or it may reflect those whose leadership extends pressure to

complete the surveys (Mertens, 1998). Burns (1997) identified two further disadvantages of surveys as being the use of standard questions which could lead to both “obscuring of subtle differences,” and the closed nature of which “annoyed respondents,” by eliminating the possibility of alternatives for those who found the response choice unsuitable (p. 473).

For this research, a survey was regarded as an effective way of gathering a broad range of information relating to rural principals’ professional practices and interactions with their communities, and their perceptions of what was working within their schools to make the schools effective. Because the survey sample consisted of principals of all rural primary schools within Otago, this meant that although the survey was confined to the Otago region, some tentative generalisations could be possible as they pertained to schools in other rural areas of New Zealand.

3.5.2 Observations.

The greatest asset of observations is that behaviour, which is assumed to be meaningful and expressive of underlying values and beliefs, can be recorded in its specific context as it occurs (Burns, 2000). In conjunction with interviews, it can provide insights into actions that would not be possible to infer from either observations or interviews alone. In this study, observations in combination with interviews and survey data provides part of the triangulation to increase the reliability of the data. However, as social beings, researchers as observers often interact with the person or group being observed. The estimated consequences of being a participant in this form was noted at the time of observations. For most participants, interviewer/respondent image, where the

respondent is aware of the reputation and standing of the interviewer and is apprehensive at the possibility of being judged by someone familiar with their type of work (Wragg, 2002), was not a problem. This was noted in comments such as “you will know all about that” in recognising this experience or “you will have found the same” in describing events. The exception was a first-time principal who admitted he was “somewhat apprehensive” and included comments such as “because I was new to the game” and “I had just started as a principal”. It was noted in this interview that the observer made more interjections in an attempt to both encourage the interviewee, and to put him at his ease.

Direct (non-participant as much as was possible) observations were chosen to precede semi-structured interviews of a purposive sample of six principals who had participated in the survey. Therefore, the order for the data collection was the survey with all rural principals, then observations and follow up interviews with the selected principals, and finally document analysis.

3.5.3 Semi-structured follow up interviews.

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) posited that the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for definition of their world by interviewees in terms of their own perspectives, rather than those of the researcher. An advantage of the semi-structured interview with the use of pre-formulated questions, is that it allowed the interviewee time to reflect and prepare for the interview (where questions are sent in advance) and promoted a more focused approach than an open interview. A more accurate gauge of time to be allowed for an interview is possible with the semi-structured rather than open interview (Miller & Salkind, 2002). Researchers have identified further advantages of personal interviews.

These include the high level of co-operation afforded researchers by the interviewee, information is more likely to be accurate because seemingly inaccurate answers can be cleared up by explaining the questions to the informants, supplementary information can be collected, and return visits to complete items or queries can be made (Groves, 1979, cited in Miller & Salkind, 2002). Disadvantages can be the high costs associated with all phases of interview operations. In this study this was not as applicable as the data gathering included visits already being made to the interviewees workplace. Further disadvantages have been noted as the human equation distorting results and the length of time compared to other methods such as telephone surveys (Groves, 1979 cited in Miller & Salkind, 2002, In this research study the possibility of the human equation distortion was lessened by the interview being conducted as semi-structured with focusing questions.

A research-based set of questions was formulated prior to interviews. These were based partly on the results of the survey and partly on the research questions developed earlier for the research study. The focus of the semi-structured interviews was on effective practices, curriculum, and community involvement. However, open-ended questions were also formulated within these categories. A number of interview schedules from the literature review were examined to assist in developing the categories for focused questioning.

This approach had a number of advantages for this study including: increased rapport between the participants and the researcher, a reduced risk of imposition of researcher's opinion, interviewees using their own language, and the promotion of an equality of status of interviewer and interviewee (Burns, 1997). Disadvantages of this

approach included the difficulty of transcription (Krueger, 1995) and the lack of confidentiality for participants (Jarrell, 2000). It is acknowledged that any approach will have both advantages and disadvantages; however, it is believed that for the purposes of this study, the advantages of observations followed by semi-structured interviews outweighed the disadvantages as it seemed likely that this approach would provide rich, useable data.

3.5.5 Researcher.

Although the possibility for researcher bias was recognised, it was felt that for overall consistency of the observations and the interviews, the advantages outweighed the possibility of bias. Barker (2006) argued that “A number of school case studies depend on our willingness to accept the personal perspective of the author and its impact on data gathering, the provisional nature of truth and the imperfections of historical reconstruction” (p. 280). The researcher had an intimate knowledge of the issues that were being researched, which assisted in both the observations and interviews. Interviewer–respondent image was an area that required sensitivity but it was felt in the interests of consistency and sympathetic understanding, the presence of the researcher was preferable to delegating this role to another researcher.

3.6 Development and Design of Data Gathering Instruments

3.6.1 Survey.

Permission was sought from various agencies and gained by the researcher to obtain and examine current surveys that related to principals’ professional practices. These surveys were from a number of agencies such as the McREL *Balanced Leadership*

Survey for school improvement (Waters et al., 2003); the Consortium on Chicago Schools for their 2003 Principal's Survey; the Kansas *Teaching, Learning and Leadership Survey for Principals*; the University of Auckland's online survey for *Monitoring and Evaluating the Curriculum Implementation Project* (2008); and from individual researchers who had focused on rural principals, such as Murdoch and Schiller (2002). A large number of surveys were assessed for relevance to the key constructs. In addition the Weiss (1989) *Principal Performance Rating Scale*, and the Hallinger and Murphy (1986) *Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale* were explored. However, because the study focused on teaching and rural principals, many of the surveys and rating scales other than that of Murdoch and Schiller (2002) did not contain relevant questions that would apply to these particular situations. Murdoch and Schiller had developed a questionnaire from their original study (which was forwarded to the researcher), and this questionnaire was instrumental in acting as an initial guide to develop the focus for some of the final constructs for this study.

A new survey of 120 questions was developed using a six-point Likert scale assessment (1. Strongly Disagree to 6. Strongly Agree; Degree of importance - 1. Low to 6 High; Level of Occurrence – 1. Low to 6. High; and Frequency of Occurrence – 1. Never to 6. Most days). The survey included five sections dealing with leadership practices, rural communities, communications within these with schools, a rural school context and curriculum and a sixth section for recording demographics.

Likert scales provided the researcher with a tool to measure respondents' agreement to a number of items. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) identified Likert scales as having the advantage of being "useful devices" for generating numbers while at the same

time differentiating responses giving a degree of sensitivity. However, they warned of the limitations of potential deliberate false replies by respondents, and like Burns' (2000) criticism of surveys, a need felt by respondents for space to make other comments or answers other than the Likert response (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 253-254). Likert scales also can be troubled by semantics, not only through the respondent's understanding of the question, but also through their unwillingness to differentiate their response to include what they regard as the extremes (Cohen et al., 2000). A further criticism of Likert scales has been that respondents surveyed tend to be positive about aspects of their own performance while more critical of others' roles. This has been borne out in a number of studies where principals' responses were significantly different from those of teachers' perceptions (see for example, van de Grift & Houtveen, 1999).

For this study the advantages of familiarity of format, ease of administration, and the allowance of providing basic information to guide the observation and interview parts of the research outweighed the potential disadvantages of the Likert format.

The general aim of the survey was to define principals' professional practices within primary schools in New Zealand. The survey contained a number of key constructs. Eisenhardt (1989) asserted that early specification of constructs was valuable in shaping research design as well as permitting measurement of them more accurately. Additionally, if analyses showed the constructs to be robust, the results would have a firm grounding for validity. The constructs chosen for the new survey to be developed were developed from exploration of research within the four sections of the literature review and were based on: professional practices and processes that principals have found successful for developing an effective school; professional practices and processes that

principals have found effective in developing and sustaining relationships within and outside the school; professional practices and processes that principals have found effective in designing and implementing a new curriculum; the concept of rurality and how this has affected both professional practices, and curriculum design and implementation; and, the demographics of rural principals.

The items developed for the survey were assembled into six sections corresponding to the constructs:

1. School leadership practices seen as important by the respondent;
2. School leadership practices as occurring in actual practice;
3. Level of communication with parents and community;
4. Rural school context;
5. Rural school curriculum and
6. Demographic details.

All of the sections of the survey originally contained a greater than necessary number of items to allow for editing. Each item was matched to a section from the literature review and to the constructs of interest. A rationale was developed for each section, and for each item ultimately included in each section. The resulting set of items were then edited for sharper clarity, cut back altogether where it was considered the question would not add any further information, or combined with other questions where it was found to be asking for identical or similar information. This procedure took place over several sessions with a final resultant survey of 86 questions ready for pilot testing.

3.6.2 Observations.

Prior to engaging in the observations, an observation schedule was developed based on previous findings from the literature review (see, e.g., Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006a; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Reynolds, 2002; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009) and from the analysis of the surveys. Three main categories from the literature review which featured leadership practices and processes found effective in setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organisation, and a fourth category to include administrative duties were used to record occurrences of observed behaviours. Sub-categories within the three main leadership practice categories that would better capture occurrences pertaining to the developed survey and this study's research questions were added.

3.6.3 Semi-structured interview.

A research-based set of questions was formulated prior to the interviews, and these were initially trialed with the principal's from two comparable but non-rural schools in Otago. Suggestions were made to add two further sub categories under Administration for BOTs and Curriculum development behaviours, and these were subsequently added to the Observation schedule. The focus of questions for the interviews was on effective practices, curriculum, and community involvement. However, open-ended questions were also formulated within these categories. A number of interview schedules from the literature review (e.g., the McREL, 2003 *Balanced Leadership Profile survey*; Weiss, 1989, *Principal Performance Rating Scale*) were examined to assist in developing the categories for the focused questioning. As with the survey, these proved to be of minimal value because they neither featured teaching principals nor curriculum development, so

that a relatively new set of categories was developed based around the research questions (see Appendix 2).

3.7 Trialling

The pilot test of the survey was then trialled in Otago with three principals (one of whom had also trialled the interview questions and observation schedule) who were outside the rural Otago area, followed by an interview with one of these respondents. Berends (2006) and Mertens (1998) claimed a paramount importance for clarity and that the structuring of sentences should ensure that interpretation was similar for everyone. Polit and Hungler (1997) went further; they argued that ambiguity in questions led to results which reflected this ambiguity and misunderstanding, and that the resulting mis-interpretation of the question could in turn lead to distortions in subsequent results.

Pilot testing of the survey was undertaken to ensure that similar interpretations of questions intended to measure key constructs were shared by the researcher and by respondents to the survey. The survey trial resulted in the wording being changed on several questions in the survey to clarify what was being asked, for example, in the trialled survey, respondents were given the following statement: *Staff, parents and community share high expectations of students*. Trialist principals felt that high expectations could be held by one or more groups, but were not uniformly held by each group. Changes were made to the statement so that in the final survey this statement became separate for each group, that is, *Staff have high expectations of students; Parents have high expectations of students; The community have high expectations of students*. In the trialled survey, a number of statements began with the words “*As principal I...*”. ...”.

It was pointed out that the survey was sent to principals only and therefore these words were redundant, and they were subsequently removed. The original survey contained the statement “*I adapt my leadership style according to the situation*”, with a number of sub-clauses regarding situations and leadership styles. Principals trialling the survey felt this was too confusing and the statement was changed to “*I don’t have a preferred leadership style*” and the sub clauses eliminated.

A number of terms which the pilot study principals indicated could possibly be ambiguous were also changed, for example the word “*emulate*” was changed to “*cannot equal*”. The statement “*Involve parents in the classroom*” was changed to “*Involve parents regularly in instructional support in the classroom*” to better capture the notion of parental involvement in classroom programmes rather than just as “helping out”. In the instructions for the section on “Communication”, the words were added “*with communication meaning more than just a greeting*” to distinguish between these levels of communication. A further trial of the survey with one other principal from a comparable rural school in Southland elicited a positive response with no other changes required.

The semi-structured interview questions were felt to be adequate and encompassing and no changes were required.

3.8 Administration of Data Gathering Instruments

2.8.1 The two-phase implementation.

The data gathering section of the research was conducted in two phases:

1. In the first (quantative) phase, the survey was sent to all rural primary schools in Otago;

2. The second (qualitative) phase consisted of both
 - observation of the principal by the researcher in six typical (but selected), effective rural schools, and
 - A timetabled interview of these selected principals followed the observations.

3.8.1.1 The first (quantative) phase.

The survey was both emailed and a hard copy posted to principals during the first term of the year, with an accompanying letter explaining the aims of the survey and the importance of their reply. The posted copy contained a return addressed envelope for easy return. In this way, principals could choose which method they preferred to complete the survey. An incentive of a pen and small notepad was enclosed, as part of the survey pack. Follow up telephone calls were made to the principals of the schools for which there had been no response. Initial response rate for the survey was just over 65% but after personal follow up calls were made to those still to respond, this rate increased to 86%. There were 10 surveys not completed: 3 from U1 schools, 3 from U2 schools and two each from U4 schools and schools larger than U4 (U1 schools are those with less than 26 students and a staffing allowance of 1.3 FTTE (Full time teaching equivalent); U2 < 58 students and staffing entitlement of 2.5 FTTE; U3 Between 59 and 120 students with a staffing entitlement of 4 – 5 FTTE; U4 schools which have an entitlement of 6 – 7 FTTE and usually do not have a teaching component; and U4+ with 8 or more FTTE and no teaching component). Correspondence from nine of these principals indicated that one of the U1 schools and one of the U2 schools had pending visits from the ERO, and felt

that they could not do justice to the survey. A further U1 school and two of the U2 schools had acting principals. Of the four large schools, one principal indicated that they felt the school was more suburban than rural, being located on the fringes of Dunedin, and the other three principals felt that the range of questions and purpose of the survey lay outside of their main experiences. Another factor which influenced these larger schools was that the principals did not have a teaching component.

3.8.1.2 The second (qualitative) phase.

The second phase consisted of an observation of two to three days and a follow up interview, with the purposively selected principals from the three geographical areas of Otago: East Otago, Central Otago and South Otago.

The sample of six principals selected for the observations and follow-up interviews were principals who had been singled out as effective by recent Education ERO reviews. In addition, the principals had also been recognised by peer practitioners as being good principals. Rather than being randomly chosen, the schools selected were in three defined areas of Otago: East Otago, Central Otago, and South Otago to create as wide a geographic spread throughout Otago as possible. Within each of the geographic areas, schools were further selected to include one small school and one large school. This latter sampling strategy was used to maximize the generalisability of any findings to other similar sized schools and to probe for any differences related to size.

The participant principals and the researcher agreed on a time for the researcher to visit the interviewee's school over several days to carry out the observations and follow-up interviews. These took place during the latter part of the year following the survey.

The first of the qualitative phase observations and interviews were completed in the middle week of term three. Principals in the schools were able to provide a timetable of what they expected to be doing during the time of observations and a time for interview. Some of these were during school time and some after class contact time.

The first scheduled visit took place in Central Otago over a period of two days. In this school the interview was held on the first day, and observations were subsequent to that. The interview was held at a time which best suited the principal's programme and as the principal was involved in class programmes in the afternoons, a morning time suited best. The observations and interviews for East Otago were carried out within one week towards the end of term three. Two days were spent in the first school and three days in the second. Both of these schools had the interview at the conclusion of observations. At this time it was felt that in light of the experience of the researcher as an experienced rural principal, two days was an adequate time to conclude all the data gathering phase of observations and interview. The next observation/interview in South Otago was carried out over two days in the third week of term four followed by the second South Otago visit in week four of this same term. The last school to be observed/interviewed was in Central Otago and this was carried out over two days in week seven of term four towards the end of the year.

The observations and interview began with an explanation of both processes. Questions for the interview had been emailed to the interviewees at least a week prior to allow for some reflection. Observations by shadowing the principal were carried out over the first two days for four of the schools, and following the interviews on two occasions. The timing of the observations was negotiated to coincide with what was hoped to be a

typical working day. For this reason interviews were held first in two schools because the time available to be free for interview were compromised over the next few days by arranged meetings. A mutually agreed time was made for an interview. Interviews ranged from one and a half to two hours. At the time of the interview an informal chat about the research project began the process. The audio-tape was then turned on and principals were asked a series of questions from the interview schedule. Where there were interruptions, the tape was turned off and restarted when the interview recommenced.

All interviews were recorded – the recorded interview was kept for checking accuracy of interpretations and to make a coded transcript. A transcript of the interview was made in the week following each interview. This transcript was then sent to the interviewee for comment and/or amendment.

During the interviews, in addition to the questions where necessary, clarification was sought about incidents and interactions arising from the observations. Distinctions were made between responses to a question and additional information during the interviews. The semi-structured interview enabled the researcher to gather information that could be used to cross-check, clarify and expand upon findings from the survey.

Public documents such as BOT minutes and school newsletters were examined to provide validation of events described by participants but not able to be observed during interviews. This provided a quick verification but was not recorded for each school

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis comprised both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. The initial analysis was quantitative analysis of the survey data followed by qualitative analysis of the observations and the interviews. The results from initial analyses of the survey and from the literature review led to the development of a list of questions to use as a semi-structured guide for the selected interviews.

3.9.1 Quantitative analysis.

The survey data were analysed using SPSS Version 16 software to obtain descriptive statistics, a factor analysis of items conducted, and reliabilities for resulting subscales. The subscales were used in *t*-tests and analyses of variance to permit comparisons among the groups based on their demographics.

The descriptive statistics gathered from the survey of all rural principals were collated and coded and reported as frequencies and percentages. Graphs and/or tables were developed to assist with ease of understanding.

3.9.2 Exploratory factor analysis.

Factor analysis is a collection of methods used to examine how underlying constructs influence the responses on a number of measured variables. Factor analyses are performed by examining the pattern of correlations (or covariances) between the observed measures. Measures that are highly correlated (either positively or negatively) are likely influenced by the same factors, while those that are relatively uncorrelated are likely influenced by different factors (DeCoster, 1998). Data-reduction capability is the

most distinctive characteristic of factor analysis (Nie, Bent, & Hull, 1970, cited in Miller & Salkind, 2002).

There are two basic types of factor analysis: exploratory and confirmatory. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) attempts to discover the nature of the constructs influencing a set of responses. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) tests whether a specified set of constructs is influencing responses in a predicted way (DeCoster, 1998)

EFA was used in this research project. The primary objectives of it are to determine the number of common factors influencing a set of measures and the strength of the relationship between each factor and each observed measure.

Some common uses of EFA are to:

- Identify the nature of the constructs underlying responses in a specific content area;
- Determine what sets of items ‘hang together’ in a questionnaire;
- Demonstrate the dimensionality of a measurement scale. Researchers often wish to develop scales that respond to a single characteristic;
- Determine what features are most important when classifying a group of items;
- Generate ‘factor’ scores representing values of the underlying constructs for use in other analyses. (DeCoster, 1998, p. 2).

In this research, factor analysis was used to determine what sets of items “hung together”, and to generate factor scores representing values of the underlying constructs for comparative analysis between factors identified from answers to the survey from

Section 1 and from Section 2. In Section 1, items explored principals' perceptions of importance for various professional leadership practices found to be present in effective schools (the "ideal"). In Section 2, this was repeated for the identical next 25 items that explored the occurrence of these practices in reality (the "actual").

Kaiser normalization was used to determine the optimum number of factors. The Kaiser criterion states that you should use a number of factors equal to the number of the eigenvalues of the correlation matrix that are greater than one (Burns, 2000). Factors were rotated using Varimax rotation to find a factor solution that was equal to that obtained in the initial extraction but which had the simplest interpretation. The resulting factors were made into subscales and the subscales scores were used as dependent variables for further analysis and comparison.

3.9.3 Qualitative analysis.

Qualitative analysis was used for the observational data and the interview transcripts. Literal and dialogical representational styles were used in brief narratives to convey a sense of each site.

3.9.3.1 Coding categories.

Coded categories were used to analyse the observational data and the interview transcripts. The categories were essentially developed from the core practices of leadership found in the literature review and from the research questions. However, they were found to converge around the four themes, research questions and constructs as outlined earlier in the literature review of the four core leadership practices :

- professional practices and processes of leadership;

- practices, processes, and interactions relating to curriculum design and curriculum implementation; and
- practices and processes relating to developing relationships and interacting within rural communities.

3.10 Validity/Reliability

Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001) termed this the degree to which, “explanations of phenomena match the realities of the world” (p. 407). Validity, therefore, is concerned with the study’s success at measuring what the researchers set out to measure. Burns (2000) distinguished among 5 types of validity: predictive, concurrent, content, construct, and face (p. 351). For the purposes of this study we are most concerned with construct validity. Predictive and concurrent validity have to do with testing issues that are not part of this study; that is, validating behaviours for the future or alongside similar behaviours. Construct validity relates to aspects of human behaviour that can be inferred but not observed, for example, the construct of “intelligence”. For this study, the construct of interest is leadership ability.

Validity can be both external – the extent to which results are generalisable (or transferable in the reference to qualitative research) and internal – the rigour with which a study was conducted, that is, the study design, and the care taken to conduct measurements.

Reliability refers to the stability, accuracy, and dependability of data. Ways of establishing reliability involve triangulation, reporting of any possible personal bias by the investigator, and the existence of an audit trail to authenticate how the data were obtained and decisions made about the data and categories (Burns, 2000, p. 475).

3.10.1 Quantative validity.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001), drawing on the initial work by Campbell and Stanley (1966), listed a number of threats to validity arising from research. Of interest for this study is the “Hawthorne effect” in which results may be influenced by the subjects knowing they are part of a study and “implementation” or “experimenter” actions may affect outcomes. As the sample for the quantative section of the study, the survey was purposefully selected (i.e., rural school principals) and included all possible participants. Therefore, reactivity due to the participants being aware that they were part of the study was of concern, but would have been shared equally among all participants. The researcher was aware of the possibility of an implementation effect but felt that the interests of consistency and sympathetic understanding should prevail and serve to nullify these effects.

Burns (1997) described content validity as the “sampling adequacy of the content of a measuring instrument . . . and is most often determined on the basis of expert judgement” (p, 273). The trialling of the survey and the questions for the interview were conducted with principals who were by reputation expert in the field of rural education and by definition given their positions, leaders; however, they were not from the same locale as the intended participants. What distinguishes *content validity* most from *face*

validity is that the individuals used for evaluation are either experts in the field or belong to the target population, that is, they are not casually chosen (Messick, 1989).

3.10.2 Reliability of quantitative data.

The surveys used in this study sought the perceptions and opinions of rural principals in the province of Otago, New Zealand. The survey instruments were not instruments to measure phenomena, therefore reliability was not relevant (Burns, 2000).

3.10.3 Qualitative research validity.

Burns (1997) contended that external validity “is not relevant to the exploratory nature of case study, which has low validity” (p. 383). This is because qualitative research is inductive and, “because it focuses primarily on understanding particulars rather than generalizing to universals” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 296). Yin (2006) proposed that rather than generalising, case study research involved making logical inferences and focused on substantive topics or issues of interest.

Mertens (1998), however, argued that the qualitative researcher also “needs to be concerned with content validity”. He concluded that, “Content validity is often established using content experts to make judgements” (p, 294). In this research, the researcher had a number of years of experience within the particular leadership field (in excess of 18 years). Primary and secondary supervisors also provided the necessary support.

3.10.3.1 Descriptive and interpretive validity.

Descriptive validity focuses on whether the account given is factually accurate, and interpretive validity concerns the accuracy of a representation in terms of what things mean to the people being studied (Eisenhart, 2006, p. 574). Interviews sought to clarify that the data were factual and that both the participant and the researcher shared similar interpretations of the data. This meant that the sense-making of the participant was accurately captured in the researcher's interpretations. The participant did not necessarily have to agree that a given description was the only representation but that it could be a plausible reconstruction of their meaning and actions (Maxwell, 2002). Transcripts of interviews were sent to the participant for verification. These forms of validity could only be set up after the data were collected and interpreted.

3.10.4 Reliability/dependability of qualitative data.

Reliability in a case study focuses on triangulating evidence, reporting any personal bias by the researcher, and stating the study steps and procedures in detail. Burns (2000) argued that what was required in case studies where it was impossible to establish reliability in the traditional sense was more of a focus on dependability. Reporting of possible bias and the ways in which the researcher made decisions about data strengthen the focus of dependability. Reliability, Burns stated, was not as important in case studies as in in-depth understanding of the explored phenomenon (Burns, 2000).

3.10.5 Triangulation.

The internal validity of research design in a case study is determined through triangulation of data gathering techniques, and the rigour of the way that the research is

executed by the researcher. Triangulation in practice means checking for consistency of evidence of information across several sources of data (Mertens, 1998). Because the study was a mixed method case study, methodological triangulation was used to validate the case study and the interpretations stemming from it. This triangulation arose from the observations, interviews, and analysis of the survey data.

Cross validation was applied to the survey results from data gathered from the follow up interviews.

3.11 Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used for the study. The development and design of the survey, observations of and semi-structured interviews with participant principals, and methods of verification using archival documents were described and discussed. As the design involved self-report data gathered from the survey and interviews, issues of validity, reliability and triangulation were addressed.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

The aim for this empirical study was to explore the professional practices of principals of rural schools in the province of Otago, New Zealand, and the interrelationships that facilitate the creation and maintenance of an effective small or rural school. In keeping with a mixed methods approach, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine the following research questions:

1. To what extent is effectiveness in small/rural schools a function of interactions within the system (context), that is, the interrelated dimensions of the principal and their leadership, the school and its adopted curriculum, and the context of the wider community?
2. What are the professional practices identified as being effective by rural primary principals in Otago?
3. What professional practices are recognised by rural principals as being most effective for developing partnerships with their communities? How are these put into effect?
4. What professional practices and processes have successful rural principals found to be most effective for implementing a “local” curriculum? What has been the effect of implementing just such a curriculum?

This results chapter presents the findings from the current study, organised first by the quantitative and then the qualitative results. The research questions that are germane to each methodology are examined in turn. The quantitative results comprise the analyses related to the responses to the survey that was sent to all rural principals in Otago in

March 2009. The results from the qualitative data comprise findings from the data from the six one-to-one interviews and observations. The qualitative findings are supported by representative quotes derived from the one-to-one interviews. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings.

4.2 Quantitative Results

A survey designed for this research was sent to all rural school principals in the Otago region. There are 73 such schools in the region, of which 63 responded, which represents 86% of the total. It should be noted that all 63 surveys were completed in full and used for all subsequent analyses. The purpose of the survey was to explore these principals' leadership practices and beliefs, both in the ideal and in actuality, and to gather demographic information about the principals. This section will present the findings from the analyses associated with the responses to the survey. The complete survey is included in Appendix 1.

4.2.1 Demographic results.

Demographic information was collected in Section 6 of the survey. Although this was the last section of the survey, the demographic responses are summarised first in this chapter, to provide a profile of the respondents, and to provide background for some of the analyses of the survey data that were based on demographic groups. The responses were aggregated using the frequency function of SPSS 16.

The gender of the principal was the first item in the demographic section of the survey (Question 68). The responses revealed that of the 63 principals who responded, 27 (41.3%) were male and 36 (55.6%) were female.

The level of highest qualification was the second item addressed (Question 69). The responses to this item, which were also examined by gender, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Highest Level of Qualification By Gender

	<i>n</i> Male (%)	<i>n</i> Female (%)	Total N (%)
Certificate/Diploma	11(17%)	10(16%)	21 (33.3%)
Bachelors	16 (25%)	20 (32%)	36 (57%)
Masters	-	5 (8%)	5 (8%)
Doctorate	-	1(1.6%)	1 (1.6%)

Although the numbers are comparatively even for both genders in terms of certificate/diploma and Bachelors degrees, only the female respondents attained higher qualifications. It is worthy to note that 66.6% of respondents have Bachelor degrees or higher.

The third item in the section (Question 70) asked for the grade of the school. Results in total and by gender are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Grade of School In Total And By Gender

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
U1	14 (22%)	13(20%)	27 (42%)
U2	3(4.8%)	10 (16%)	13 (20.8%)
U3	3 (4.8%)	9 (14.4%)	12 (19.2%)
U4	4 (6.4%)	3 (4.8%)	7 (11.2%)
>U4	3 (4.8%)	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.4%)

NOTE. U-Grade Roll size: U1 = 1-50
 U2 = 51-100
 U3 = 101-150
 U4 = 151-300
 U5 = 301-500

Small rural schools with rolls less than 100 (63.5%) form the majority of rural schools in Otago. Female principals tended to be prevalent in both U2 and U3 schools, but only one female is principal of a school > than U4.

The next three items (Questions 71-73) asked the respondents to report their years of experience both as an educator and as a principal. It is worthy of note that 32 (51.2%) of principals who responded to Question 71 (How many years have you been an educator?), have had at least 20 years experience as educators, and 4 (7%) have had over 40 years experience. In contrast, for Question 72 (How many years have you been a principal?), there was a dichotomous response. Sixteen (25.4%) had been a principal for three years or less, and 37 (60%) had been a principal for more than 20 years. Responses to Question 73 (How long have you been a principal in this school?) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Number Of Years As Principal In Present School

Number of Years	Frequency	Percent
< 3 yrs	16	25.6
3 yrs	12	19.2
4 yrs	8	12.8
5 yrs	6	9.6
6 yrs	4	6.4
Over 6 yrs	17	27.2

It is interesting to note that over 25% of principals have been principal of their present school for fewer than three years, with two-thirds of the principals (66.7%) in their present school for five years or less. Examining these responses in conjunction with the responses from Question 72 suggests that the principals in this sample are reasonably mobile, especially in their early years of principalship.

The next item was Question 74, What position did you hold **immediately prior** to this appointment? Responses revealed that 22 (35%) of principals had held positions in schools involving some responsibility. The highest response was 12 (19%) for deputy principal. A further 15 (23.8%) had been a principal of a smaller school, and six (9.5%) reported that they had been principals of a larger school. Only eight principals (12.7%) had been appointed to their current principalship directly from classroom teaching.

Question 75 explored the age range of the principals; results are shown in Table 4. It can be noted that only 16% of all principals were younger than 40.

Table 4: Age Range

Age in Years	Frequency	Percent
< 30	1	1.6
30 – 39	9	14.3
40 – 49	28	44.4
50+	25	39.7
Total	63	100.0

In Question 76, principals were asked in an open-ended item, What do you think is an optimum number of years to be in one school as a principal? The most frequent response was for five years (8 principals; 12.7%); if a range is taken from 5 -10 years, the response rate rises to 36 (57.1%) Fewer than 8% (five principals) believed that the optimum time was less than five years. Eight principals (12.7%) chose not to respond with an optimum time but commented instead. All eight principals referred to how relationships were faring and six (9.6%) commented that a number of factors were involved and they could not specify a particular time.

The next two items, Question 77 and 78, explored principals' personal backgrounds and their knowledge of the district prior to their appointment there as principal. For Question 77, In what environment were you raised?, Twenty eight (44.4%) indicated that they were raised in a mainly urban environment, a further 11 (17.5%) principals were brought up in a mixed environment, and the remainng 24 principals came from rural backgrounds. For Question 78, How well did you know this district before your

appointment as principal?, 46 (73.0%) of the 63 respondents either knew the district well or had some knowledge of the district before appointment. The remaining 17 (27%) principals knew only that the school was a rural school.

Question 79 asked principals, What **most** influenced your decision to be principal of this school? One third ($n = 21$; 33.3%) saw the appointment as career advancement, while 28 (44.4%) chose the appointment because of availability at the time. Twenty-five principals (40%) made further comments qualifying their responses. Fifteen (24%) of these twenty-five principals commented on the lifestyle choice, while six (10%) indicated that they had been encouraged to apply by varying groups including Boards Of Trustees.

Table 5 shows the responses to Question 80 - Please indicate your degree of satisfaction with being a principal.

Table 5: Degree of Satisfaction with Principal Role

	Frequency	Percent
Very satisfied	14	22.2
Mostly satisfied	32	51.2
Satisfied	6	9.6
Partly satisfied	9	14.4
Dissatisfied	2	3.2

The majority ($n = 52$; 83.2%) of principals were satisfied to very satisfied with their position. Only two (3.2%) of the 63 respondents felt dissatisfied with their present position. It is interesting to read this result in relation to the next item, Question 81 (If I could, I'd prefer...), which explored the principals' preferences their ideal positions. These results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Principals Preferences For Their Ideal Positions

	Frequency	Percent
Larger school	21	33.3
Different school the same size	1	1.6
Different location	1	1.6
Different position in a school	2	3.2
Staying in this school as principal	34	54
Different position outside education	3	4.8

Two results stand out in this item. First, over half (34 principals; 54%) prefer the status quo. Second, one third (21 principals; 33.3%) would like to be in a larger school. These results inform those of the previous item, which indicated a response rate for overall job satisfaction but also some dissatisfaction.

The last five items in the demographic section, Questions 82 - 86, addressed the principals' interactions with their communities. In Question 82, the principals were asked, How often do you attend events in the local community other than school events? One third (21 principals; 33.3%) responded *frequently*; a near majority (30 principals; 49.2%) attended events once or twice a term; and, 12 principals (19.2%) reported that they rarely attended community events. These results are in contrast to the next item, Question 83, How often do you visit the homes of students who attend your school? In this item, 33 principals (52.4%) responded with *visited occasionally*; 29 principals (46%) responded *almost never*; and one principal (1.6%) visited student homes frequently.

For Question 84, the principals were asked, Do you take part in local groups or society activities? If so please list. This was an open-ended item. The collated responses showed that just over half (33 principals; 52.4%) took part in a wide variety of local groups and societies, with the majority of those citing various sports clubs or local fundraising events. However, 14 principals (22.2%) did not include any local groups, and a further 16 (25.4%) of the principals responded that they either didn't take part in local groups, or didn't have time to take part.

The penultimate item, Question 85, was, Do you live in the local catchment area of the school in which you are principal? Over half (35 principals; 57.1%) reported that they did not live in the local catchment area of their school.

The final item, Question 86, asked, Have you formed personal friendships in the local area as a result of being principal in this school? The majority (53 principals, 84.1%) responded, *yes*. Of the 10 (16%) principals who answered *no*, eight of the principals had been in their present school for one year or less. Five (8%) of the principals qualified their negative response with explanations related to living a distance from the school. Relating this item to Questions 21 and 46 on the survey, which asked principals about the importance of meeting socially with staff outside of school, and the actual practice of meeting with staff socially outside of school, it can be seen that the principals tend to both value and engage in this practice (see Figure 1). Two non-respondents to those items noted distance from home to school as an intervening factor.

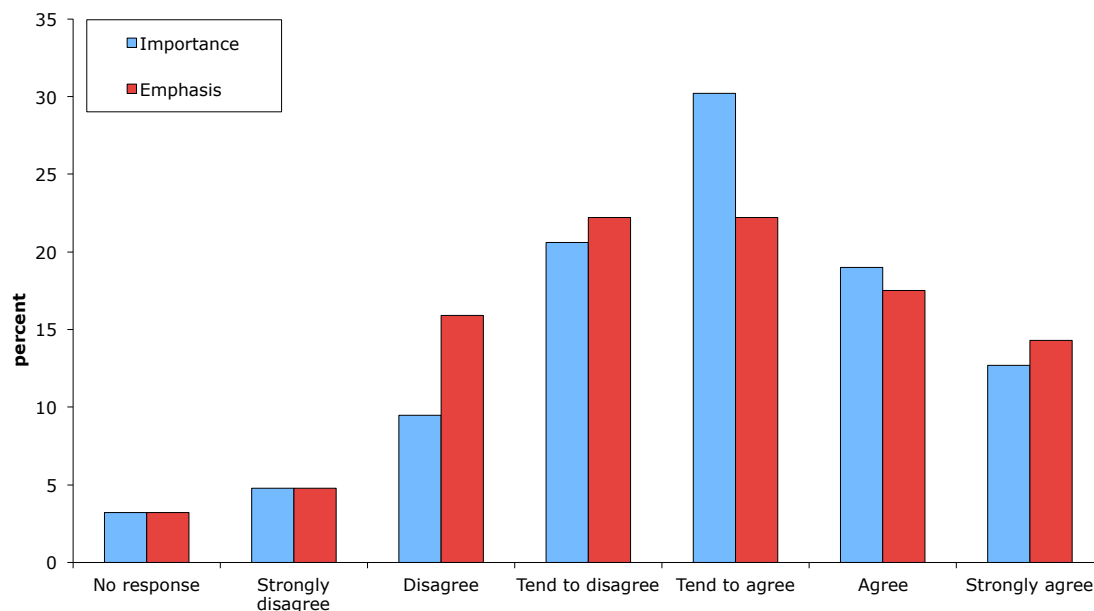


Figure 1: I meet with staff socially.

Overall, principals who answered the survey tended to be satisfied in general with their position (82.5%) and would prefer to stay as principal in their school (34: 54%), but at least one third (21 principals) would prefer a larger school. Principals tended to be in the 40 - 60 years age range with only 10 (16%) younger than 40. Twenty four (38%) came from a rural background but a further 11 (17.5%) had some time in a rural environment when growing up. A large number, 46 (73%) knew the district before appointment and many principals saw the appointment as a life choice. Most had had some position of responsibility before being appointed principal, many as deputy principals, and only eight (12.7%) came directly from classroom teaching. Over half of the principals 33 (52.4%) took part in a wide variety of events in their communities but in contrast one (1.6%) visited pupils' homes. Most (53: 84.1%) had made friends as a result of being principal, and the remaining 10 principals had been in their school for less than one year.

4.2.2 Survey analyses of school leadership practices perceive importance (the ideal) and frequency of occurrence in actual practice.

In the first and second sections of the survey, principals were asked to rate 25 characteristics of school leadership, using a Likert-type six point scale ranging from 1 (low) to 6 (high) to indicate disagreement to agreement on the items. The 25 characteristics comprised leadership practices identified in recent research as those found in effective schools. The first section of the survey asked principals to rate each of the 25 items in terms of importance to them as rural school principals. In the second section of the survey, the 25 items were repeated; however, in this second section, the principals were asked to rate the characteristics in terms of occurrence in actual practice. In other

words, section one rated items according to the principal's "ideal" practice, and section two rated items according to "actual" practice. These terms will be used to describe the two sections within the survey.

Tables showing the results for each item may be found in Appendix 4. The terms "ideal/important" and "actual/emphasis" have been used in all tables to define these responses. In general, the results showed a wider range within responses in section two (the actual practice) than in section one (the ideal practice). In the next section, the results pertaining to the factor analysis of these items and the use of the resulting subscales as they relate to the research questions will be presented.

4.2.3 Factor analyses of survey items pertaining to school leadership practices.

Using SPSS version 16, factor analysis was used to examine the two sets of 25 items on the survey that pertained to the importance of school leadership practices and the actual practices of the principals responding to the survey. A factor analysis was conducted first for the 25 items pertaining to the "ideal" and then separately for the 25 items pertaining to the "actual." In both factor analyses, varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was used, with a criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1. Scree plots were examined to confirm that this criterion was appropriate for the data. The cut off point for loading on each factor was .35. In each factor analysis, six factors were obtained; however, the same items did not load on the factors. The results of these factor analyses will be presented next.

Table 7 and Table 8 show the factor structure for the six factor solutions for the "ideal" and "actual" items from the survey.

Table 7: Factorial Structure Of The Six-Factor Solution for the Ideal Items (n =63)

Item	Factor					Communality	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	h2
Staff share a consensus on goals	.759	.113	.019	.118	.116	.068	.622
Shared beliefs learning/teaching	.835	.162	.087	.145	-.097	.017	.762
Staff share sense of community	.766	.216	.146	.031	-.128	-.164	.700
Staff talk about curriculum	.809	.131	.015	.302	.049	.085	.774
Staff high expectations	.158	-.258	.651	.101	.122	.031	.541
Parents high expectations	-.041	.051	.912	.011	.159	.068	.866
Community high expectations	.030	.056	-.099	.068	.016	.216	.743
Involve staff in decisions/policies	.822	.299	-.099	.068	.016	.216	.828
Directly involved curriculum	.236	.184	.168	-.311	.3	.555	.631
Regularly monitor curriculum	.001	-.001	.375	.205	.753	.170	.779
Regularly monitor achievement	.073	.167	.131	.062	.858	.022	.791
Model new teaching/assessment	.486	-.011	.028	-.075	.292	.287	.411
No preferred leadership style	.112	.110	.127	-.031	-.050	-.729	.576
Leadership style involves others	.276	.208	.330	.536	-.199	.395	.711
Confident with learning initiatives	.536	-.059	.021	.266	.007	-.256	.427
Encourage staff to express opinions	.793	.299	-.018	.118	.057	-.174	.765
Engage with staff in discussion	.773	.221	.101	.186	.162	.026	.718
Teaching time protected	.063	.732	-.128	.091	.141	.355	.711
Open door policy	.446	.691	-.050	-.141	.092	-.121	.722
Take into account personal aspects	.384	.797	-.020	.045	-.060	.052	.791
Meet with staff socially	.199	.526	.174	.449	-.031	-.060	.553
Encourage staff try new year levels	.170	-.047	-.218	.775	.125	-.192	.732
Staff encouraged to exchange roles	.351	.178	.045	.715	.164	.087	.703
Staff follow established routines	.517	.289	.130	.487	.336	-.081	.724
The BOT expects the principal	.184	.645	-.028	.180	.183	-.269	.589

Item	Factor						Communality	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	h2	
Eigenvalue	8.04	2.76	1.96	1.71	1.57	1.13		
% of Variance	32.16	11.06	7.82	6.82	6.28	4.51		
Factor	Designing the organisat-ion	Develop-ing people	Expecta-tions	Flexi-bility	Monit-oring	Leader-ship style		

Table 8: Factorial Structure Of The Six-Factor Solution for the Actual Items (n =63)

Item	Factor						Communality	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	h2	
Staff share a consensus on goals	.863	-.129	.224	.045	-.036	.061	.819	
Shared beliefs learning/teaching	.752	-.272	.225	.122	-.002	-.146	.727	
Staff share sense of community	.614	-.266	.113	.191	-.192	-.186	.569	
Staff talk about curriculum	.797	-.102	.207	.176	-.085	-.052	.730	
Staff high expectations	.029	.053	.105	.003	.740	.090	.570	
Parents high expectations	-.080	.864	.012	.154	.070	-.012	.782	
Community high expectations	-.156	.868	-.001	.067	.100	-.197	.831	
Involve staff in decisions/policies	.862	.097	.067	-.042	.020	.035	.759	
Directly involved curriculum	.259	.110	-.122	.315	.170	.660	.658	
Regularly monitor curriculum	.014	.046	.106	.825	.117	.118	.722	
Regularly monitor achievement	.041	.181	-.055	.732	-.054	.023	.577	
Model new teaching/assessment	.589	.313	-.012	-.078	.459	.241	.719	
No preferred leadership style	-.041	.024	.252	.245	.558	-.426	.619	
Leadership style involves others	.819	-.020	.148	-.007	.010	.053	.696	
Confident with learning initiatives	.487	.205	-.033	-.023	.157	-.619	.688	
Encourage staff to express opinions	.869	.161	.067	-.090	.080	-.097	.810	
Engage with staff in discussion	.838	-.18	.113	.152	-.058	.015	.742	
Teaching time protected	.375	.072	.211	.222	-.187	-.138	.294	
Open door policy	.752	.011	.189	-.062	.113	.314	.716	

Item	Factor					Communality	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	h2
Take into account personal aspects	.814	.134	.059	-.058	-.099	.089	.705
Meet with staff socially	.436	.344	.267	.037	-.557	.108	.703
Encourage staff try new year levels	.098	-.49	.859	-.046	.079	-.050	.761
Staff encouraged to exchange roles	.463	-.015	.704	-.041	.029	-.068	.717
Staff follow established routines	.425	-.010	.688	.221	.076	-.009	.708
The BOT expects the principal	.194	.562	-.104	.094	-.216	.246	.481
Eigenvalue	8.53	2.53	1.95	1.54	1.46	1.11	
% of Variance	34.11	10.09	7.78	6.14	5.84	4.44	
Factor	Designing the organisation	Developing people	Expectations	Flexibility	Monitoring	Leadership style	

4.2.4 Factor analysis for the “ideal” section.

Six factors were obtained. The items were examined for each factor to determine a label that could be applied. Descriptor labels which referred to the four core leadership practices described in the literature and found in successful schools were used for naming the factors. These factors were then treated as subscales and coefficient alpha was computed to determine the reliability for each subscale.

The first subscale is *designing the organisation*, as the items related to developing structures that support and sustain the performance of all and give direction to the school. Ten items loaded on this subscale, with a coefficient alpha = .91. This factor was so named as the 10 items that loaded onto it related to notions about processes that encourage or have an impact upon designing or redesigning the organisation.

Commonalities that linked across these items related to shared beliefs and involving staff

in decision making processes. Items on this subscale also related to respondents following common procedures and sharing a common purpose. The 10 items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item. Numbers relate to the item number on the survey.

2. Staff have shared beliefs about learning and teaching.
8. I involve and negotiate with all staff in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.
3. Staff engage often in talk about curriculum with each other.
16. I encourage staff to express their opinions even when they may be contrary to mine.
17. I engage with staff in discussion related to current theories and practices.
4. Staff share a sense of community and co-operation.
1. Staff share a consensus on school goals.
15. I am confident with learning initiatives that have uncertain outcomes.
24. Staff follow clearly established routines for dealing with difficult situations.
12. I model new teaching and assessment practices for other staff.

The second subscale, called *developing people*, comprised five items that addressed a supportive climate under the leadership of the principal. The coefficient alpha for this subscale =.79. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item.

20. I take into account the personal aspects of staff when making decisions about support and resourcing.

18. Teaching time is expressly protected.
19. My office follows a truly open door policy; that is, I always make myself available to staff.
25. The BOT expects the principal to take the initiative in most aspects of decision making in this school.
20. I meet with staff socially outside school hours.

The third subscale was called *expectations* as it related to expectations of students by staff, parents, and community members. Having high expectations is a further essential leadership practice. Three items loaded on this subscale, which yielded a coefficient alpha = .77. Items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item and numbers relate to the item number on the survey.

6. Parents have high expectations of students.
7. The community has high expectations of students
5. Staff have high expectations of students.

The fourth subscale in the ideal section was made up of three items that addressed matters of *flexibility* within the organisation. It related to both redesigning the organisation and developing people and was called flexibility. It had a coefficient alpha = .69. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item and numbers relate to the survey item number.

21. I encourage staff to try new year levels.
23. All staff are encouraged to exchange teaching roles and/or team teach.

13. My leadership style routinely involves others.

The fifth subscale addressed monitoring processes and was termed *monitoring*. This subscale dealt with the implementation and management of the instructional programme. It comprised two items with a coefficient alpha = .75. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item and numbers relate to the survey items.

10. I regularly monitor student achievement.

11. I regularly monitor curriculum goals.

The sixth and final subscale for the ideal items, *leadership style*, comprised two items with a coefficient alpha = .30. relating to leadership style and curriculum involvement. This somewhat low reliability is most likely related to comments by the principals that they found the item, *I don't have a preferred leadership style*, to be ambiguous. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item. Numbers relate to the survey item number.

13. I don't have a preferred leadership style.

9. I am directly involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum.

4.2.5 Factor Analysis for the “actual” section.

As with the factor analysis for the “ideal” section, six factors were obtained and the items were examined to determine a descriptive label. These factors were then treated as subscales and coefficient alpha was computed to determine the reliability for each subscale.

The first factor, as with the ideal items, related to *designing the organisation*. However, 12 items loaded on this factor; that is, two more items for actual section as compared to ideal. In addition, two of the items from the ideal did not load in this factor for the actual. Those items are: *I am confident with learning initiatives that have uncertain outcomes, and, Staff follow clearly established routines for dealing with difficult situations*. This subscale yielded a coefficient alpha = .93. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item. Numbers refer to the survey item number.

16. I encourage staff to express their opinions even when they may be contrary to mine.
1. Staff share a consensus on school goals.
8. I involve and negotiate with all staff in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.
17. I engage with staff in discussion related to current theories and practices.
14. My leadership style routinely involves others.
20. I take into account the personal aspects of staff when making decisions about support and resourcing.
9. Staff engage often in talk about curriculum with each other.
2. Staff have shared beliefs about learning and teaching.
18. My office follows a truly open door policy; that is, I always make myself available to staff.
3. Staff share a sense of community and co-operation.
12. I model new teaching and assessment practices for other staff.

19. Teaching time is expressly protected.

The second subscale from the actual section was made up of three items which addressed expectations of the students by the community, by parents and by staff, and was called *expectations*. It comprised three items with a coefficient alpha = .71. However, in this actual section, this subscale, instead of *Staff have high expectations of students*, the item, *The Board of Trustees expects the principal to take the initiative in most aspects of decision making in this school* is included. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item.

7. The community has high expectations of students.
11. Parents have high expectations of students.
12. The Board of Trustees expects the principal to take the initiative in most aspects of decision making in this school.

The third subscale, termed *flexibility*, again differs by one item to its counterpart for the ideal. Three items loaded on this subscale, with a coefficient alpha = .78. However, the item, *Staff follow clearly established routines for dealing with difficult situations* loads on this subscale for actual as compared to *My leadership style routinely involves others* on the ideal subscale. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item and numbers relate to the survey item number.

21. I encourage staff to try new year levels.
23. All staff are encouraged to exchange teaching roles and/or team teach.

24. Staff follow clearly established routines for dealing with difficult situations.

The fourth subscale for the actual section addressed *monitoring* processes. This was the fifth subscale in the ideal section. There were two items loaded on this subscale with a coefficient alpha = .61. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below.

Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item.

10. I regularly monitor curriculum goals.

11. I regularly monitor student achievement.

The fifth subscale replicated that of the ideal section. This subscale was not as clear to interpret; two of the items concerned leadership characteristics, and one a perception of staff expectations. These three items yielded a coefficient of .38. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item.

5. Staff have high expectations of students.

12. I don't have a preferred leadership style.

22. I meet with staff socially, outside of school hours. (negative loading)

The sixth and final subscale related to *principal initiatives*. There were two items that loaded on this subscale with a coefficient alpha = .135. This is a low reliability. The items that loaded on the subscale are shown below. Appendix 4 shows graphs of the individual responses for each item.

15. I am directly involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum.

16. I am confident with learning initiatives that have an uncertain outcome.
(negative loading).

4.3 Communication

Section 3 of the survey sought principals' responses to three items regarding meeting or communicating with parents and/or the wider community. Three items were asked; these three items loaded on one factor. The data are presented here in tables.

Responses were given on a 1-6 Likert-type scale, where:

1 = never; 2 = once a year; 3 = once a term;

4 = once a month; 5 = once a week, and 6 = most days.

For the first item, *How frequently do you meet with or communicate with parents*, it should be noted that the principals were in frequent contact with parents; over half reported that they met with parents on most days.

Table 9: Frequency of Meeting with Parents

	Frequency	Percent
Never	-	-
Once a year	-	-
Once a term	3	4.8
Once a month	5	7.9
Once a week	20	31.7
Most days	35	55.6

The pattern is slightly different for Question 52, *Meet with or communicate with the wider community on school activities*. Table 10 shows that nearly 40% of the principals

reported that they only engage with the wider community on school activities once each month.

Table 10: Frequency of Meeting with Wider Community

	Frequency	Percent
Never	-	-
Once a year	1	1.6
Once a term	12	19.0
Once a month	25	39.7
Once a week	21	33.3
Most days	3	4.8

Question 53 was, How frequently do you involve parents regularly in instructional support in the classroom?

It can be seen that parents are involved on a regular basis in classroom programmes. This is not surprising given that rural communities offer strong support to their local schools. A third of the schools, 21(33.3%), involved parents on a weekly basis and roughly a further third of the schools, 23 (36.8%), reported that parents were involved in classroom programmes at least once a month. A further analysis examined this involvement by roll size of schools. As Table 11 shows, the responses from the principals from the U1 schools showed the most variability, as compared to the others.

Table 11: Involvement of Parents in Classroom Programmes

	U1	U2	U4	U4	>U4	Total (n)	Percent
No response					1	1	1.6
Never	2	-	-	-	-	2	3.2
Once a year	1	1	2	-	2	6	9.6
Once a term	6	3	3	-	-	12	19.0
Once a month	6	3	1	3	-	13	20.6
Once a week	9	5	2	1	-	17	27.0
Most days	3	1	4	3	1	12	19.0
Total	27	13	12	7	4	63	

4.4 The Rural School Context

Items in this section sought responses to questions about the rural context and its importance. Principals were asked to rate their responses on a six point scale of either strong disagreement or strong agreement. The seven items in this section loaded onto one factor. Tables have been used to depict results.

Question 54 elicited responses to whether rural schools offered a family community that urban schools would find hard to emulate. Fifty principals (79.4%) either agreed or strongly agreed that this was so, with a further seven (11.1%) partly agreeing.

There was a similar response to Question 55 that asked whether rural schools and their communities shared common values. Results are shown in Table 12.

Table 12: Rural Schools and Communities Share Common Values

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	1	16
Disagree	3	4.8
Tend to disagree	7	11.1
Tend to agree	22	34.9
Agree	21	33.3
Strongly agree	9	14.3
Total	63	100.0

Respondents who disagreed with Question 54 in nearly every circumstance also disagreed to the same degree with Question 55.

Results were markedly different for Question 56 that asked whether rural schools were an integral part of their community. Fifty-nine of the 63 respondents (93.7%) either agreed or strongly agreed. Of these responses 44 (69.8%) chose strong agreement.

Agreement or strong agreement characterised responses to Question 57, which asked the importance of rural schools establishing strong communication links with school families or wider community. Thirty-two (50.8%) or responses agreed and a further 23 (36.5%) strongly agreed with the importance of communication.

In Question 58 the expectation that staff will be involved in communities outside school hours elicited an $n = 54$ (86%) agreement rate; with $n = 13$ (20.6%) choosing

agree; 19% (12) strongly agreeing and the greater majority agreeing. This confirms research findings from the literature review.

Table 13 shows the overall positive agreement with Question 59 that rural schools provide more than just an academic education.

Table 13: More Than an Academic Education

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
Tend to disagree	2	3.2
Tend to agree	4	6.3
Agree	29	46.0
Strongly agree	28	44.4
Total	63	100.0

Positive agreement accounted for over 90% of responses.

The last item in rural context Question 60 asked principals to respond as to whether rural schools were pleasant places to work in. Results are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Rural Schools Are Pleasant Places to Work

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	1	1.6
Tend to disagree	2	3.2
Tend to agree	7	11.1
Agree	27	42.9
Strongly agree	26	41.3
Total	63	100.0

Nearly 85% of principals either agreed or strongly agreed while there were none who strongly disagreed.

4.5 Rural School Curriculum

Section five examined various aspects of rural schools' curriculum in terms of its influence and how it is affected by the context. The seven items in this section loaded onto one factor. Tables have been used to depict results.

That rural school curriculum should be based on rural values and its own community and culture formed the basis of Question 61, (16: 92%) of the respondents responded positively with 26 (41.3%) who strongly agreed with the principle of rural values dominating the curriculum.

Question 62 explored the prospect of community affecting curriculum decisions. Again, over 61 (90%) responded positively. However on this question, strong agreement attracted a reduced nine (14.3%) response

The next four questions (Question 63 - Question 66) were based on the importance of a local curriculum. The principals were consistent in their positive responses of greater than 60 (93%.) Responses of tending to agree over the three Questions averaged 14 – 15 (20 - 25%) and the balance of the positive responses (45) went with agreed or strongly agreed.

Question 63 asked principals whether they thought a local school curriculum that engaged the community directly ensured community support for the school.

Question 64 invited responses about the impact of a local curriculum on the community. Only four participants (6.3%) from the 63 respondents disagreed that there was an increasing impact by schools in their community using a local curriculum.

Question 65 explored the concept of whether a local curriculum produced visible results of engagement and achievement. Four participants (6.3%) disagreed to some degree; 28 (46%) agreed, and 18 (28.6%) positively agreed.

A development of an appreciation of place as an outcome of a local curriculum was examined in Question 66. Fifty nine principals (93.7%) responded positively with 23 of the 59 principals (36.5%) strongly agreeing that this occurred and was important.

Table 15 shows results from Question 67, which explored the extent, that teachable moments took preference over timetabled programmes.

Table 15: Teachable Moments Take Preference Over Timetable

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	2	3.2
Tend to disagree	2	3.2
Tend to agree	16	25.4
Agree	21	33.3
Strongly agree	22	34.8
Total	63	100.0

Three of the negative responses were from the larger schools U4 and >U4. The other negative response (from a smaller school) was qualified with the remark, “depends on how many times”.

Quantative summary

In general principals found rural schools pleasant places to be and to work in. Most schools tended to share values and principles with their communities perhaps as a result of wide consultation undertaken, and school staff enjoyed close working relationships with their colleagues. Local curriculum was vitally important especially for the small schools U1 to U3, and was perceived to gain support from the local community for the school and to lead to schools having an impact within their local communities. Small schools tended to be more flexible in terms of timetables and using teachable moments,

to cement understanding. Principals took an active part within their communities outside of school groups and were in constant touch with their wider communities as well as their parent community.

Principal profiles tended to follow those found in research in Scotland (Wilson, 2007; Wilson & McPake, 1998) in that principals were found to be male in the larger schools, generally under 50 years of age and above 40 years and had extensive teaching experience. A large number of principals (57.1%) lived outside their school's catchment area, but were involved in community groups and activities outside of school. Many were from rural backgrounds and had positions of responsibility before being appointed as principals in their present school. (12.7% only came directly from classroom teaching) and had some knowledge of the school district before appointment (73%).

4.6 Qualitative Results

4.6.1 Results from interviews.

This section will describe the results obtained from the interviews with the six principals. Questions asked were those developed a priori, based on the research questions; additional questions were developed based on the observations and the survey results. A complete list of questions is contained in Appendix 2. This section is organised by each question that was asked. Findings are summarised, with representative quotes used to illustrate the findings. Then, overall themes that emerged from the interview data are described. This section will conclude with a brief summary of the interview results.

Interview question 1: *What factors have you found are the most critical for*

success in a rural school context?

This question related to the first research question.

Factors that principals found critical for success in a rural school context often related to the establishment of trust and good relationships with community and particularly with their own Board of Trustees. Several principals mentioned the factor of time. “To develop trust takes time” was a sentiment expressed frequently as was the critical need for local knowledge, and not rushing in to change things. Most principals expressed a need for having high expectations, and having agreement with staff over important matters, such as discipline. It is important to note that all of the principals responded that a range of factors are critical; it was not the case that there were one or two definitive elements. As one principal of a larger school stated:

I believe that critical success factors is an amalgam of a number of things: it's relationship management, it's community empathy, it's practical professionalism and it's delivering what you promise - that brings together some credibility.

Somebody that is trustworthy. They don't necessarily want them to agree with them all the time but they want to know that they are heard, that their opinions are considered and that decisions are made through a fair process taking into account some of the realities, so it's finding that practical pedagogy, practical professionalism, practical people management, and bringing that all together in a community context. That's the heart of it. (Principal E, large school)

Having a professional support network was reported as important by principals in the smaller (U1 - U3) schools, as was an affinity with the environment, and knowing the power brokers, who wield influence over others:

Making sure that somehow you can get involved in a professional support network as a rural principals is important whether that be a cluster that's around you or an artificially little, made up group – like the ones they have in town [referring to Dunedin]. (Small school principal C)

For large school principals it was important to know not just the people but the rural environment as well. This principal stated that, “learning people’s first names so that everything is personal, and understanding rural commitments” (Large school principal B) - this last referring to seasonal differences in farm management.

Interview Question 2: *Which professional practices have you found to be particularly effective as a rural principal? What hasn't worked? Any reason you can put this down to?*

This question related to research question 2.

The six principals responded that professional practices that would be most effective would be similar to those in other schools, not just rural schools, and would include shared beliefs about teaching and learning, common values that were visible and articulated, all alongside a supportive teaching environment in which instruction was individualised and met the students’ needs. The principals noted that shared understandings had come about through staff and principals talking about effective practice together and attending relevant professional development workshops. Four of the

schools had implemented extensive community consultation over the new curriculum and how this would affect programmes; all schools maintained frequent communication with their parent community and the wider community through newsletters, personal phone calls and local community radio broadcasts. Two of the large schools had students involved in a weekly programme of school news through the local community radio station, as part of their media studies.

The professional practices reported to be most useful differed between large school principals and small school principals. Large school principals emphasised practices related to staff development and redesigning the organisation. The small school principals emphasised practices more in line with teaching and the instructional programme, and developing networks both professional and with their communities. These results must be understood in context. Small schools have teaching principals, often having a 50% or more commitment to classroom teaching during their week, as compared to large school principals, who have responsibility for larger numbers of staff but have little or no teaching commitments. All six principals were unanimous in their endorsement of needing to build up trust both with, and between staff, and with their communities. “You live or die by your staff” was a sentiment expressed by two of the three large school principals. All six of the principals noted that community empathy and trust needed time to develop and, “working in partnership with your community is absolutely critical” (Small school principal F). The six principals noted that shared understandings, understanding rural seasonal commitments, and good teaching underlie positive relationships being developed. Local knowledge was deemed critical both for developing the curriculum and for pleasant working relationships.

Small school principals, perhaps given their relative isolation, especially looked for positive relationships with their Boards of Trustees in management of their schools, and professional support networks for their instructional programmes. These principals noted a range of personal characteristics that they believed would help that included diplomacy, open mindedness, and flexibility with a positive attitude. Two of the small school principals mentioned that they belonged to social groups other than school parents and this was for them extremely positive. Sporting groups which were not particularly related to the school as, for example, golfing groups or in this case, flying groups, were appreciated as a distancing factor from always being thought of as the school principal rather than as a person with a separate interest and identity. Two principals agreed that having a young family themselves had acted as a conduit to being welcomed in community groups and being introduced to and meeting further community members. All six of the principals felt they were living in a “glass bowl”, and all agreed it was not good policy to try to change too many things too quickly and certainly not without consultation, be they traditions such as prize giving, events such as pet days, or practices relating to how children were promoted or even disciplined.

Large school principals emphasised the need for agreement over internal policies, such as discipline amongst staff. This was also important for small school principals, in particular with their release teacher. Having high expectations for student’s academic achievement and behaviour was expected by all principals interviewed, and having these affirmed by parents and community was considered important. If community support was lost or trust was lost, the three small school principals stipulated that the principal had no other recourse than to leave. Large school principals qualified this by which sectors had

lost trust, and in general believed that the situation could be remedied over time. To ensure that all staff were “on the same page” (an expression often used by principals during interviews), all three of the small schools and two of the large school staffs including relief teachers, had whole-school meetings and consultations with parents, to plan and draw up guidelines as to expectations of behaviour and consequences – a behaviour management system. Large school principals felt that it was important to be involved in teaching for at least part of the week so that collegiality was seen to be maintained, or as two of the three large school principals stated, they could be seen to be “walking the walk and talking the talk”. For large schools, establishing an effective management team was an important focus to set standards. One principal described this as having, “your hatimotos (standard bearers) because they are your living, breathing professionalism” (Large school principal E), and hold people accountable where accountability involved student progress as well. This meant the teacher was accountable for having daily lesson plans in place for running the class efficiently, as well as taking into account the various levels of instruction required for satisfactory progress to be made by all children. One large school principal stated that one of the most effective practices was, “the simplest – it’s the weekly staff meeting and it’s most effective because you have to get everybody in the one room at the one time and tell them all the same thing to bring that unity” (Large school principal E).

Robust debate and shared dialogue were two other commonly expressed practices. It was interesting to note that two of the small schools involved students in this dialogue, as well as parents and wider community. All schools, large and small, advocated an open door policy for all staff, students, and parents.

Small school principals were aware of their community's expectations of their being good teachers because as one principal stated, "at the end of the day that's what it's all about really – they (parents and community) want to know you are a good teacher – that's what you are there for. Communities expect excellent teaching for their kids!" (Small school principal D). Letting the students know that teaching them was the priority was a sentiment expressed by the small school principals, especially at times after they had had several interruptions for administrative purposes.

4.6.1.1 What hadn't worked?

When asked about practices that hadn't worked, it was the large school principals who were vocal. Larger school principals referred to not moving people too fast or not trying to be innovative too early "You've got to lead the mob but don't...you can't get too far ahead of the mob" (Large school principal E). Appraisal that was quite rigorous in terms of teaching quality took time to be accepted. Peer assessment and peer appraisal were useful in developing a culture that was less defensive in terms of appraisal in the small schools. Large school staff appeared to be more conversant with rigorous appraisal. Small school principals referred to incidents from their teaching practice, for example not sending students to time out as the students were using this procedure to get out of work – time had to be made up helped solve this problem.

4.6.1.2 Questions in the interviews that came from results of the survey.

The next section of the interviews involved following up on the results obtained from the survey. The first question in this section probed for a deeper understanding for the finding in the "actual" section of the survey that although staff had high expectations

of students, parents were less likely to have high expectations. Four of the school principals interviewed denied that this was the case in their school but stated that they were aware of the issue elsewhere. One large school principal put it down to class issues - differences in cultural capital within the district, which they felt was more cosmopolitan than urban schools. In the urban setting there was a bigger pool of people at the same socio-economic level, whereas in the rural environment there were larger differences within smaller amounts of people as for example within a small group of parents there could be parents who were on board of directors of nationally recognised organizations, and parents who were dysfunctional druggies.

What happens is that you are going to have even within the class, an element of parental opinion that doesn't value education the way teachers value education because they might have smaller world view or have had bad experiences in education...there is a tension between the aspirational and the real...we sometimes see that parents are grounded in the real and teachers are quite focused on the aspirational (Large school principal E).

Principals also felt that it was too easy to blame parents who were often struggling in today's recession and that teachers needed a bit more empathy for them – that they (the teachers) were often incredibly self-righteous (Large school principal E). Small school principals alluded to the traditional farm succession, which could lead to formal education being of less value and more value being placed on practical matters, such as learning to drive both vehicles and machinery. The same school principals referred to students being kept at home during busy periods to help out, for example during hay making season. At least two of the areas in Otago were undergoing dairy conversions of

traditional sheep and beef farms, and these had had the effect of removing parent volunteer help at the local schools. The presence of dairying working against traditional rural school values was mentioned by three of the principals:

It tended to be a change in process. A move to dairying caused this in a number of rural areas. This [dairying] is becoming more established in other provinces than Otago but it has meant there isn't that bank of people you can call on and in the Waikato its been established, - down here it's completely new and different and I think its where they were finding their values quite different. (Large school principal D)

These sentiments were in concurrence with those principals from the small schools who agreed but found also that in their situation where in the majority of families only one parent worked and they still had not had the volunteer help from the other parent that it was more a case of attitude. As they stated, "I also think it's attitude...most parents here would rather write a cheque than help out in the classroom (Small school principal F).

The next question probed the result from the survey that indicated that teaching time was expressly protected less than 50% of the time. Principals were asked how they would explain the discrepancy and how they would change it. Large school principals had less of a problem with programmed bells and an organised timetable. Small school principals referred to the lack of administrative or other staff, to deal with emergencies or simply to answer phone calls within class time. All small school principals had procedures in which students answered the phone initially, and depending on the status

and nature of the call, these were delayed until recess or lunch times. Parents' calls were always referred on, as they understood they were calling within class time and it was considered expedient to answer their call. Small school principals bemoaned the fact that:

What eats into my teaching time often is the unforeseen things that I've got to deal with then and there – admin things – like a school break in – it took me a whole morning to deal with that and the kids did well. (Small school principal C)

Large school principals found that staff would speak up if something occurred and, “if it's encroaching on their time they will have planned for the teaching and to be honest they will say something if there is” (Large school principal D). Large school principals also believed that, in general, principals of all schools found it hard to say no and to ask always whether it was worth the time taken out of the day:

We have to get off the horse of doing things because we are always doing them. We have to be more deliberate in choosing where we put our energy...we have to change it in two ways – as leaders we have to be more insistent by saying that's not our core business [referring to beach education programmes] and we also have to encourage our teachers to be a little bit more confident in articulating their educational beliefs.... Government doesn't help either by making us the repository of all activity that are going to save our society from financial literacy to second languages to healthy eating and ... sometimes we have to let the politicians know and the ministry and even the NZEI that that's not the case:

Once we ‘ve got heads down, tails up and students achieving then you can add the other stuff on...if it’s not going to enhance the class programme for every child, which is something that can happen if its devolved to a lower level, then it shouldn’t happen (Large school principal E).

Small school principals distinguished between interruptions, and events that were a teaching opportunity, but that disrupted the normal class programme. Incidents such as whale watching, or visits from local dignitaries were considered teaching opportunities that added impact rather than disruption.

4.6.1.3. Developing partnerships.

The next question in the interview was in several parts. The questions were:

- What strategies have you found to be successful in developing partnerships with your community? Have you shared these with other principals?
- What hasn’t worked for you?
- Are you planning anything new/different in the future?

These questions related to research question 3.

All six principals referred to, “having or knowing key people in the community...some spies out there”, and to the practice of wandering the playground before and after school, meeting at the school gate with the school gate committee.

Things that worked out well were some of the out of school activities was a sentiment agreed to by all participating principals. The opportunity was valued to meet fathers while standing on the sideline at weekend and community sporting events, school

camps, boating etc., where the fathers often had some expertise in outdoor pursuits and therefore were more likely to volunteer to take part. Community events or working bees were another avenue for encouraging the presence of dads. The famous or infamous pet days were mentioned as another out of school week activity (all small schools have an annual pet day. The infamous comment refers to how many dogfights had occurred at one of these days).

Teacher-only days funded by the ministry were found to be helpful for small schools who broke such days over two parts, on the morning and afternoon of two different days, to get better representation from parents and community members. Two of the smaller schools had children taking work home for sharing with parents and other community members, and an incentive for children bringing back related comments. The incentive was originally a chocolate fish, but was changed to points towards a group reward after students who hadn't been as successful complained. Small schools had set up a community database, with names and areas of expertise that community members were willing to share with the school.

Principals had only shared strategies and resources with each other on an informal basis, generally through local cluster networks. Small school principals were more likely to have shared with other small schools than larger schools with either each other or with their "feeder" small schools. One small school principal had shared some successful strategies at the First Time Principals Organisation, but this was the only formal sharing carried out by any school. (First Time Principals was set up in 2001 by the MOE as an outcome from complaints about lack of support for new principals by the profession. It was a residential course in school break times to provide intensive development for

appointees to principalship for the first time, and was supervised and run by experienced principals who also acted as mentors for the new appointees.) All principals agreed that it was face to face contact that served best. Open afternoons, an open door policy, and special invitations were cited as effective in developing partnerships.

New strategies tried included targeting fathers and their occupations through classroom programmes (one small school), and learning assemblies in which children organised, directed, and ran informative open meetings for short periods explaining their classroom programmes in a specific area and acting as guides on a walk through classrooms at the school. These were particularly successful for two of the small schools and were held end of week with a wine and cheese blandishment (for the attending parents) to gain support for parents attending. One school mentioned trying something online, such as blogging, once some expertise had been gained by interested parents enabling them (the parents) to take part.

Strategies that didn't work almost always included the formal consultation process – questionnaires and surveys that elicited little interest and few returns. “Consultation is a misnomer – it's about communicating what you are doing and allowing people to feed into that in some way (Large school principal E).

4.6.1.4 Section 3: Communication

The principals were next asked to comment on the finding from the survey that regular parent involvement was reported as more frequent in larger schools than smaller schools. Participants were asked how they would interpret this result and the implications they could see arising from this.

Five of the principals expressed surprise at this result, expecting that it would have been the smaller schools who had had greater parental involvement. However, distance to the school was offered as an explanation with the addition of, “larger schools have more parents who can walk the distance – have that ease of contact” (Large school principal B). “Perhaps the perceived need is less because of smaller numbers, and in larger schools with greater numbers perhaps they won’t get as much individualised instruction time...more adults and more time would mean her son was benefiting” (Large school principal A). All but one principal mentioned that dairying had had a significant impact on parental involvement at schools in rural areas and that, “fewer farms were employing married couples as much as previously” (Small school principal D). In those earlier times, often the wife of the married couple had more time to volunteer. Principals from 2 small schools mentioned that parental involvement is generally a junior school thing, with older pupils in Years 7 and 8 not wanting parents involved too much. Large school principal E explained, “every school had a different context – kura kaupapa (schools which entail full immersion in Te Reo) have a huge number of parents coming in because of the nature of their school. A prep school won’t.”

4.6.1.5 Section 4: Rural context.

Results from the survey showed that 20% (12) principals all from small schools disagreed that their schools and communities shared common values. The six principals were asked to comment on this finding and offer their ideas to readdress the balance.

Principals were in general dismayed at this finding and the consensus was that “it’s all about knowing your community” (Small school principal C). All six principals agreed that these schools needed to listen to their communities:

When strife occurs it’s generally because there is an unwillingness to listen to the community. At the end of the day it’s their school. The people who work in rural schools have to have an empathy for a rural community, they have to take on board the values and belief of that community, and where you have dissonance between them, that it is often about strongly held opinions and strong promoters of that difference within the mix. And often I would actually say the fault, in my opinion, lies with the professionals. You can’t push communities too far. (Large school principal E)

“Keeping your ear to the ground and having the nouse to figure it out what it’s about” (Large school principal A)

”Making any sorts of links you can between the values that the school holds and putting them in the context of reflecting their communities values” (Small school principal C).

4.6.1.6 Implementing the new curriculum/ implementing new national standards.

The next question asked the principals to:

- Identify your most successful strategies in implementing the new curriculum.
- What would you have done differently now, if anything?

- How will you work to implement the new standards that are being introduced both within your school, with your staff, and in terms of reporting to parents?
- Identify your most successful strategies in implementing the new curriculum?

For the small school principals, the most successful strategies were invariably working with the students and involving them in whatever was being done. This ranged from sending information and questions home for homework, with families filling in responses (Small school principal D), to:

one of the most powerful things for me – working with the children on our mission statement and what it means for them and then going from that to our vision what they really need to be learning.... The children wrote that and then taking it to the board and they were amazed at what the kids had done and then taking it one thing at a time and unpacking it, modelling, exploring, and encouraging it, what it says in the document [referring to ministry documents sent to each school regarding implementing the new curriculum]. (Small school principal C)

The message was clear that for small school principals, “Children are an integral part of our planning process” (Small school principal F).

4.6.1.7 What would you have done differently now, if anything?

When asked what they would do differently, all 6 principals replied they would take more time with staff to spend on unpacking a lot of the information and concepts involved, for example, “spend time on the key competencies – really drawing them out and not just looking at what they are but linking them in with the values and principles as

well before taking those understandings to our communities” (Large school principal D), or from the small schools:

With the values that has all come from the parents and now we are taking one value at a time and unpacking it, and exploring it, and working out what it really means, with the children as well, but, that takes time and we need to take more time if we really want to have it as part of our school.... I would if I was doing it again. (Small school principal C)

Small school principals emphasised they would be campaigning strongly to keep the present BOT at the next elections because they felt they were only just coming to terms with what was required. “I just feel that we are just starting to gel actually as a group so I’d be really sad to see them go. How will I get them to stay on...oh” (Small school principal C).

4.6.1.8 How will you work to implement the new standards that are being introduced both within your school, with your staff, and in terms of reporting to parents?

At the point of interviews, most of the principals had not received the national standards documentation but felt it would not incur too much change, as they were benchmarking achievements already. “They [the benchmarks] were aligned very closely with the standards” (Small school principal F). However, it should be noted that five of the principals were opposed to the standards and the directions they were taking, and felt money could be spent on more worthy areas of support for learning.

All principals stated that reporting to parents was pretty much on track in the style of national standards, with three schools already graphing results. “We are also asking our parents what they want us to achieve and that’s more what we will be working towards” (Small school principal C).

4.6.1.9 Local Curriculum

Results from the survey indicated very strong support for a local curriculum, particularly from the small schools (U1 – U3), who were unanimous in support. Principals were asked a series of questions relating to local curriculum, as follows:

- Can you identify the focus of your local curriculum?
- Are there changes you would like to make to your local curriculum?
- How do you design and implement your local curriculum?
- Does any other staff member have major responsibility for the design and implementation of curriculum. If so what do they do? If not, would you like assistance with this or does it work well the way it is? Why/why not?
- Questions asked will be repeated followed by responses to each question.

4.6.1.10 Can you identify the focus of your local curriculum?

All six principals emphasised the child-centred focus of their curriculum and the importance of the child’s voice being recognised. Small schools tended to have a more localised curriculum than the larger schools. That meant that content of the curriculum came from the locale the school was in, for example, one coastal school had a marine emphasis for topics and projects. An inland school had an outdoor pursuits curriculum, with one block term of skiing on at least one day per week for one or two terms. A

further small school with a larger Māori settlement and early history worked with the local runanga and marae to incorporate those aspects into its curriculum. The larger schools recognised the pertinence of a local curriculum through projects from local environs:

People in this area have a strong sense of place...they would like their children to appreciate the reasons why they came to live here and they are very supportive of anything we do outside in the local area. We try to use our place and be out in their [the students'] world, which is exciting for them. (Large school principal A)

Local history is important and so features in our curriculum. Also, the interests of the local area are supported, so that swimming is very strong and IT and money is found for these areas so we have to find the time and programme to fit. (Large school principal D)

4.6.1.11 How do you design and implement your local curriculum?

Small school principals included parents and local expertise in designing plans and putting programmes into place. These were designed with childrens' interests at heart, from topics featuring the local area. Small schools used combined planning days with all staff. "We plan together and use our local resources and local people and community links as much as possible" (Small school principal C.)

We work with the children primarily...we go to the kids first and then staff will look at it and then the board and parents. Parents will be surveyed and then we bring all that back to the kids and tell them this is what everybody thinks – where to next? It's so empowering to give them the direction of the curriculum and so it has

a local flavour to it. We have a democratic curriculum, which means that the teacher has only one vote and each child has a vote too. (Small school principal F)

From work displayed on the walls and in children's books and in the open teachers' planning guides, it was obvious that the inquiry approach to learning had been incorporated in all six schools. Curriculum topics were fully integrated so that all essential learning areas were involved in each topic as far as possible. The new key competencies were aligned with topics and were often an integral part of self assessment at the end of topic. Two schools had developed a matrix of indicators that demonstrated different achievement levels for the key competencies, and a further school had developed indicators within each topic showing achievement levels. All schools demonstrated extensive consultation with their parent and wider district members to refine their curriculum areas.

4.6.1.12 Does any other staff member have major responsibility for the design and implementation of curriculum? If so what do they do? If not, would you like assistance with this or does it work well the way it is? Why/why not?

All schools, even small schools, had at least one staff member who took responsibility for an area of the curriculum. This involved finding relevant resources, suggesting topics, and sourcing activities and visiting experts. In the small schools, this person tended to be the teacher who had strengths or interests in that particular area. Large schools each had a management team that had several curriculum leaders based in various levels (ages) of the school, for example junior, middle school, and senior school

syndicate curriculum leaders. The principals were happy with their progress with implementation but stated that they would like more release time or at least assistance from someone with curriculum design skills. The MOE had produced a range and number of resources relating to curriculum implementation as part of the drive to implement the new New Zealand curriculum and these were both appreciated and used. The MOE had also arranged for two free days for schools to use to meet with their local communities. These were known as teacher only days and were not required to have children attending school. This enabled all schools to have open days with their communities to work together to decide on content.

4.6.1.13 Demographics

In this section, the principals were asked about the significance of the finding from the survey demographics that only females reported having gone on to attain a higher qualification than a degree, that is, undertaken post graduate study. Principals were asked who should be encouraged to attain higher qualifications and what the implications for that would be.

It was perceived by all of the principals that males were generally upwardly mobile and as the primary bread winners, their families moved with them; whereas, women were more likely to remain geographically “stuck.” The suggestion, therefore, was that women looked to post graduate study to keep them stimulated professionally, when other avenues for advancement were closed off. “The feminisation of tertiary education was being reflected in school principals” (Large school principal E referring to recent newspaper data about the explosion of numbers of women attending university. Over two thirds of

graduates were women) was another response female principals felt it gave them something extra to compete with in the appointment process. One of the larger school's male principals observed that this finding was an indictment of male principals and that post graduate work was delivered in an "unmale" manner, with lots of readings and time pressure, which women were better at organising. By the same token, he also felt that all principals should be encouraged to obtain higher qualifications, regardless of gender (Large school principal E).

4.6.1.14 A different position.

The survey results showed that 40% of the principals surveyed responded that they would like "to be in a different position". Principals were asked for their opinion as to why this occurred and what sort of different position did they think would be wanted?

The six principals were not surprised at this result, citing the stress and the heavy workload associated with their positions. Lack of support and the fish-bowl aspect of rural principalship were other issues raised to explain these findings. Most rural principals will relate to the following:

One of the greatest joys of my life was when I ran a school and I lived away from the school and I could go down the street in my old clothes, unshaven. I could wear what I liked; it didn't matter. Didn't have to talk about school, didn't have to say, 'Hi, how are you?' and remember the name of that child (Large school principal E).

Three of the other principals responded that there is simply an optimum time to be a principal, after which it was time for a change. All of the small school principals stated that they would opt for a larger school with less teaching commitment.

4.6.1.15 General Questions.

In the final section of the interview, principals were asked three questions focusing on the role of rural principal. The first question asked principals to explain the finding from the factor analysis that proposed developing staff as a priority for principals, but for stakeholders the priority involved expectations of students and principals by the schools' stakeholders, rather than developing staff. All three of the large school principals and one of the small school principals saw this as two sides of the same coin – with developing staff leading to better achievement overall. Large school principals saw the vehicle to raising student achievement as developing their staff professionally and for small schools staff were seen as the link in the middle to higher achievement. In addition, for small schools the, “principal’s workload is affected if staff are better because they will take on leaderships roles and” responsibility (Small school principal F). Small school principals felt that staff with more experience gained by professional development would take on roles that they themselves would normally have to shoulder, for example, in curriculum development or in behaviour management and in this way the principals would have more time and less responsibility:

Stakeholders don't see behind the scenes work. One is an outcome, the other a process. The number of people mean I can't do it myself. I have to do it through other people so professional development is the means to an end. (Large school principal E)

From a community viewpoint, transient principals and staff are viewed as a commodity that comes and goes; whereas, the students are going to be in the school

for eight years or more, so they are the priority. Often teachers are seen as those who should already have the skills, and so any development is simply helping teachers for the next school that they go to rather than the one they are in at present.

(Large school principal A)

The final two questions were about how their role as principal compared with their expectations and the qualities they saw as being important for that role.

All six of the principals interviewed felt that what they were doing was within their expectations, apart from the work overload, especially in terms of the overall amount or more mundane tasks. The feeling of isolation had struck home as well. “What I haven’t been prepared for was when things go wrong, the feeling that you are utterly on your own” (Small school principal C).

When asked the most important qualities for principals in rural schools, a number of characteristics were named and repeated over the 6 interviews. They included the following:

- Being a person of integrity,
- Trustworthiness,
- Competent teachers – Communities will forgive the smaller things if they are competent as teachers,
- Organised,
- Good at relationships,
- Up front when you are struggling,
- Preparedness to listen,

- Sticking to one's own principles,
- Character,
- Good at communicating,
- Supportive of staff,
- Available,
- Approachable,
- Having a sense of humour,
- Collaborator,
- Keeping up while not always following the latest,
- Broad shoulders/low blood pressure,
- Sensible shoes,
- Having some knowledge of rural practices and local history where it mattered,
- Wanting to be there, summed up by:

And that's what the quality of life is all about. They [principals] are not an economic unit, but people who have their passions and choose to live the life where they are. You need to like rural life and really like kids. (Large school principal D)

4.6 Themes Emerging From the Interviews.

Themes emerging from the interviews replicate many of the themes found in research on rural schools.

4.6.1 Theme 1: A close connection with their community.

All principals expressed the critical need for knowing their community well and engaging with them positively. This involved not just the usual newsletter, but new and

different ways to attract fathers, the personal face to face contact with community leaders and inspired means of encouraging visits to the school, and the days when the school hoped to work with community and parent members in more depth. They all also agreed that schools needed their own “spies” out there to keep them in the know with what was happening in the community or how the community was reacting to new procedures. Parent and volunteer community help was welcomed, indeed a necessity in classroom programmes and to keep the school in a positive financial situation.

4.6.2 Theme 2: A local curriculum.

A local curriculum that used the local community, its history and environs as its content was recognised by all schools as important as was the rural flavour of the curriculum which included traditional events such as Pet Days and annual Agricultural and Pastoral shows (known locally as the A & P show). In these shows there was always a section for the school to showcase some of the children’s work in both artistic as well as academic areas. Children were always fully involved with their own animals in the pet sections and in the various farm animal sections such as best lamb or best calf. It was considered a big mistake to criticise these entries in an unknowledgeable way. Strict rules governed the final placements and, schools were held responsible if the judge didn’t have enough experience to make the final decision in the expected manner. Large schools recognised that local history and environs were important for their students as well, but it was the small schools for whom a local curriculum was vital.

Schools welcomed the opportunity that the new New Zealand curriculum and the stocktake had provided. All schools would have preferred more time to embed the

changes before the new curriculum became gazetted, which meant that it had to be in place and used. An inquiry approach to teaching and learning had been adopted in all schools to cater for children's interests.

4.6.3 Theme 3: Curriculum responsibility and implementation.

All schools had consulted widely with their communities to implement the new curriculum focus. Large schools had a curriculum team which included both a junior and senior children's curriculum leader. Two of the small school principals had involved students as part of their curriculum design, implementation and consultation. Small school principals generally had the responsibility on their own for the design and implementation of curriculum but had on occasion awarded a management point to a teacher who had above the ordinary expertise in that particular learning area.

(Management points gave the teacher a form of extra responsibility in return for recognition of leadership and extra pay). The small schools also involved on occasion outside experts to assist with specific learning areas. These outside experts were usually advisory officers from the local provider of teacher training. Large schools tended to use outside expertise more regularly to provide workshops for staff in professional development. Small school principals took place in professional development alongside their teachers, however large school principals were more likely to attend a relevant conference or outside event run for principals by other principals or a principals' agency.

4.6.4 Theme 4: Workload and stress. Networks.

All principals had issues with the increasing workload and associated stress. The "glass bowl" effect of rural communities also made work/life balance a further issue

which principals struggled with. Principals who were able to join local groups which didn't involve school matters found this of benefit, as did those principals who had a young family to help them integrate into the local community. Small school principals made use of local school clusters and networks for extra support.

4.6.5 Theme 5: Leaderships practices were affected by context.

Leadership practices differed between large and small school principals. Small school principals practices were dominated by those relating to the instructional programme. These small school principals had a large teaching commitment of up to 80% on a weekly basis, whereas large school principals sometimes had no teaching commitments or a maximum of 20% on a weekly basis. All of the schools were using the four core practices found by research to be essential for success.

4.6.6 Theme 6: National Standards and reporting to parents.

Despite four of the principals opposing national standards and the direction that these indicated education was going, all principals felt the Standards would not be a major hurdle as they were all benchmarking achievements already and that these benchmarks aligned fairly closely with the National Standards. All principals felt they were pretty much on track with reporting to parents as well, but were also going to ask parents what their levels of achievements for their children would be and that these (the parents' benchmarks) were the ones they would be working towards.

4.6.7 Theme 7: Demographics.

All six principals agreed that as most lived outside their catchment area socialising with staff was less of a priority than in the past. Distances to schools also meant that it

required more of an effort to attend community events, but that these were still more or less a mandatory requirement as part of their role.

In general, principals were not surprised by the survey result showing female principals had earned post graduate qualifications and male principals hadn't. Female principals who also happened to be the small school principals noted that it showed the bias in the profession, but this wasn't the same for the male principals who had not come up against the bias. The three large schools interviewees were all male, and saw study and the amount of readings it entailed as a female thing and part of the "feminisation" of tertiary study.

Principals were in the main happy and satisfied with their role, and their expectations of the position were in general what they had thought they would be. A couple of the principals found the workload, especially the paperwork, more than expected and all six principals found the life work balance difficult. One of the small school principals found the position of being last in the line somewhat challenging. Principals who had a young family found that this helped initially to be integrated into the community.

4.7 Results from Observations.

Six principals were purposefully chosen to represent a large school (U4 and above) and a small school (U1) from each of the three areas of Otago: Coastal (East), South Otago, and Central Otago. These principals were observed in a non-participant manner over a period of two days in their own school prior to an interview with each of them,

also held at their school site. Total time in the school including the interview time was up to 3 days.

An observation schedule was developed using three of the headings from Kiwi Leadership (a guideline produced by the MOE for New Zealand principals in 1999). This schedule is shown in Tables 16 and 17. The word in parentheses is the Te Reo interpretation of the English. Observations were tallied for each of the indicators and totalled as to the amount of time spent for each event. The three headings also relate to the four core leadership practices found to be essential in all effective schools. A fourth heading, Administration, was added to the schedule to permit observations of the management duties of the principals.

Table 16 presents the observations summed totals over the observation period of up to three days for large schools. Table 17 presents the summed totals over the observation period for small schools.

Table 16: Observations From Large Schools

Leadership practice observed	Comment	Tally	Average time
Setting Directions (Manākitanga)			
Shared Understandings			
• Identifying/articulating vision	Visiting principals	2	2h
• Fostering acceptance of group goals	Staff meetings	3	5h
• Creating high performance expectations	Senior management teams	1	1h30m
• Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and curriculum	Teaching for sick teacher	1	3h
Total		7	11h30m
Developing people (Awhinatanga)			
Building capacity			
• Support for individuals - personal attention	Meeting student teachers	1	30m
• Modelling values and practices - Walking the Talk	Visiting classrooms	9	3h20m
• Active participant in teacher learning - intellectual stimulation	Professional reading summary	1	30m
• Acknowledging achievements	Assembly/Special assembly	3	1h30m
• Fostering the development of other leaders/ Distributive leadership	Meeting DP/AP	4	5h
• Strategic resourcing	Installing computers		
Total		19	12h
Redesigning the organisation (Ako me Pono)			
Structures that support and sustain the performance of all			
• Building collaborative cultures - enforced	Children sent to office	3	15m

Leadership practice observed	Comment	Tally	Average time
discipline and social expectations			
• Democratice and participative decision making	Summarising staff questionnaire	1	3h
• Developing productive relations with parents/ community	Making decisions re classes		
• Knoweledge sharing	Meeting new parents/enrolling	2	1h
Total		6	4h15m
Administration			
• Communications/phone/email/sales people	Phone sales	5	2h20m
• Clerical	answering letters attending to mail		
• Financial	Accounts	Accounts/auditor	1 2h
		Treasurer	1 1h
	projects	Hall project	1 1h30m
	payroll	Payroll	2 2h
• Property	inspections	Grounds/water	1 1h30
		Inspection	3 2h
• BOT	communications	BOT chair	3 2h
	property	Groundsman	1 15m
	financial	Auditor	1 2h
Total		19	12h

Table 17: Observations From Small Schools

Leadership practice observed	Comment	Tally	Average time
Setting Directions (Manākitanga)			
Shared Understandings			
• Identifying/articulating vision		4	6hr
• Fostering acceptance of group goals		2	2hr
• Creating high performance expectations		1	1hr
• Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and curriculum		3	4-6hr
Total		10	6hrs
Developing people (Awhinatanga)			
Building capacity			
• Support for individuals - personal attention	With PR tchr D2/new tchr	1	15m
• Modelling values and practices - Walking the Talk	With classroom tchr D1	1	20m
• Active participant in teacher learning - intellectual stimulation	Modelling in classrooms D2	3	3hr
• Acknowledging achievements		1	45m
• Fostering the development of other leaders/ Distributive leadership			
• Strategic resourcing		1	45m
Total		7	5h5m
Redesigning the organisation (Ako me Pono)			
Structures that support and sustain the performance of all			
• Building collaborative cultures - enforced	Children sent to office	2	10m

Leadership practice observed	Comment	Tally	Average time
discipline and social expectations			
• Democratic and participative decision making	Other teacher timetable issues	1	15m
• Developing productive relations with parents/ community	Meeting cluster	1	1h30m
	Ruaka/marae	1	2h
	Meeting new parents	2	1h
	Meeting parents before/after school	3	45m
• Knowledge sharing	Writing newsletter		
Total		10	5h45m
Administration			
• Communications/phone/email/sales people		3	10m
• Clerical	answering letters attending to mail	8	10m
• Financial	accounts projects	3	2h
	payroll	2	1h30m
• Property	inspections	1	1h30m
• BOT	communications	1	1h30
		3	15m
	property	1	1h30m
	financial	1	1h
Total		23	9h25m

4.8 Summary of observations.

4.8.1 Large school Principals.

Large school principals' time was almost evenly divided over the three main practices. Even though large school principals were supposedly not teaching principals as such, over the two to three day observation period, they were observed to be involved in classroom teaching for an average 3 hours and 30 mins each. For one principal, this was related to a sick staff member, but for the other two principals this was a normal practice, which they endorsed. Administration for the large school principals took up 10 hours on average. Even though they had administrative assistants, they were still spending time involved personally replying to emails, letters, phone calls, etc. A large amount of time was seemingly spent dealing with payroll. "It's seems as though it's never ending" (Large school principal E). Administration for one large school principal was exacerbated by the fact that the school community was involved in a dispute over water rights with the local council and it was taking time to both track down the original historical agreement and to send this on to the appropriate authority, and to contact the appropriate authority within the council who could deal with the queries.

Observations pointed to the close contact that principals kept with their BOT and particularly with the chairperson, and how the BOT chairs were involved with the school on an almost daily basis. Observations showed, too, that principals were involved with the BOT member who had responsibility for property, in weekly inspections of property and playgrounds to ensure they were safe and physically sound. Phone calls from parents averaged one or two a day during the time observations were taking place, and a further

three or four from companies or sales staff, selling resources or similar. The mail was normally sorted by the school secretary, but took an average 15 – 20 minutes on a daily basis for the principals to deal with. In total, the large school principals worked on average 9 hours per day on site.

4.8.2 Small school principals.

Small school principals, who already spent 25 hours per week teaching, found administration tasks onerous at an average 6 – 7 hours per week. With paid secretarial help averaging 3 – 4 hours per week, administrative tasks were often completed during recess, lunch, or before and after school. For one small school principal, huge amounts of time were involved during the sourcing, financing, and establishment of an over scale building. (Each public school is granted an amount of building/land space according to roll size. Because finances for property maintenance, heating, and light are involved in the annual amount sent to school by the government, overscale buildings have to be financed, insured, heated, etc., and maintained separately by the school from its own finances). This venture would have added an extra hour to one and a half hours per week to the administration time.

Small schools observations demonstrated that each principal spent an average of 2 hours or less (total 5hr 45m for a combined total of the three schools observed) on developing people and redesigning the organisation. Most of their time, other than teaching and setting directions, was committed to communicating and working with parents and community. Small schools over the time of observations averaged three phone calls a day from parents and four from outside the school district, usually sales

people intent on selling a resource. Sorting the mail often took half an hour daily to sort, open, scrutinise, and file, and was generally dealt with at lunchtime. Answering emails and letters took a further 30 – 50 mins daily. School inspections of buildings and land space and generally took half an hour weekly.

Overall, it can be seen that schools are very busy places and time is valuable for both large and small principals. The observations took place at the quiet time of the year, with no significant events planned, and one can imagine the extra time that is needed during parent interviews and report times. When time is factored in for the actual planning of school programmes, especially at the different levels found in the ordinary rural school classroom, and professional development is undertaken to upskill teachers and the principal, in the various learning areas as well as learning styles, it seems very little is left for private and family time within a working week, especially if, in these rural areas, principals are also expected to attend community events and weekend sporting fixtures. It is understandable that it may be difficult to maintain a work/life balance.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the professional practices of principals of rural schools in the province of Otago, New Zealand, and the interrelationships that facilitate the creation and maintenance of an effective small or rural school. The basic tenet of this thesis is whether effectiveness in rural schools is a function of interactions within the system: leadership, curriculum, and community, or a function of the different roles of leadership in the rural context. This study examined the professional practices of rural school principals in the province of Otago through a combination of a survey of all rural principals, followed by observations and interviews with six purposively chosen rural principals from the three areas of East, South, and Central Otago.

The following four research questions were selected for the study:

1. To what extent is effectiveness in small/rural schools a function of interactions within the system (context), that is, the interrelated dimensions of the principal and their leadership, the school and its adopted curriculum, and the context of the wider community?
2. What are the professional practices identified as being effective by rural primary principals in Otago?
3. What professional practices are recognised by rural principals as being most effective for developing partnerships with their communities? How are these put into effect?
4. What professional practices and processes have successful rural principals found to be most effective for implementing a “local” curriculum? What has been the

effect of implementing just such a curriculum?

This chapter presents a discussion of the results together with recommendations for future research. The chapter is organised according to the key findings, a discussion of those findings and how they relate to and extend the extant literature, followed by sections regarding the limitations to the study and recommendations for future research.

5.1 Key Findings

There were two key findings: context matters and context is important for curriculum, both in regard to context. It was identified that small rural school leadership was qualitatively different from that in larger rural schools, as a consequence of being a teaching principal for small rural schools, but also as a consequence of the context of small school itself. Leadership practices, although consistent with the core practices identified by research, varied in emphasis within the different contexts of large and small rural schools.

Second, context was also important for curriculum. A local curriculum was considered critical and was incorporated in some form in all rural schools, regardless of size. Ninety three percent of respondents in the survey were generally positive about the importance of a local curriculum and only 6.3% disagreed that there was an increasing impact by schools in their community by using local curriculum. The local community and environment provided a particular focus for the basis of curriculum in small rural schools – not just the local history, but the community and the physical environment itself. Larger schools also recognised their unique rural context in some form of

curriculum development, but this was not as noticeable as it was in the smaller schools, in particular schools classified as U1 (rolls < 26), U2 (rolls < 58) and some U3 (rolls < 102).

These key findings will be discussed in turn, both as they relate to the literature and in terms of how the results extend the current knowledge base.

5.1.1 Context matters

For small rural schools, the finding in this research that context matters supports previous research that has found that context is of major importance for rural schools. Clarke and Wildly (2004), in investigating leadership in rural contexts in Australia, believed that an understanding of the leadership role could not be divorced from their context of small rural schools. Clarke (2002) had earlier proposed that small rural school leadership in Queensland was directly influenced by context. These findings have major implications for aspiring rural leaders, as well as all educators working in rural areas and educational systems in countries such as New Zealand that have a large component of schools that come under the definition of rural. If an understanding of context is critical to effectiveness in rural areas then the context must be investigated prior to appointment.

Results from this study give credence to the traditional cautionary view of how those in rural communities view outsiders who would take charge in their local area, whether principals or others. Understanding a rural community comes from spending time within it, not from outside, and this may mean that the most effective principals for rural schools come from within the staff already present, who know their community intimately, and who have already established effective working relationships within it. If context is important, and this research has found that it is critical, then the Roundtable

solutions for ailing schools, as suggested in 2001 by people like Roger Kerr (chief executive officer for The Business Roundtable since its inception in 1986), to promote importing principals who have been successful elsewhere, will fail unless time is given for the person coming in to get to know and work with the community over a reasonable span of time. In addition, the headhunting solution proposed in the past to fixing schools that are failing falls well short of meeting the needs demanded by the rural school context (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Other departmental areas such as ERO, who have been assiduous in finding failure in rural areas (see, for example, Otago Daily Times reports in July 2002) will also need to critically assess what is possible within a different timeframe from what they have customarily given for schools to turn around results and make improvements.

Until recently, newcomers to the role of principal, particularly in small rural areas of New Zealand, were watched over and guided by a range of advisory groups. More recent times, however, have seen a flight of experienced teachers and principals from the country to urban areas, the disbanding of Education Boards, and the demise of rural advisors. In addition, Education Development Initiatives (EDI) (introduced in the early 90s by the Ministry of Education), and school closures have seen a gradual eroding of the numbers of small schools, to the extent that small rural schools are becoming an endangered species with much greater distances between them. This has brought with it a number of concomitant problems, the most critical being an increase in inexperienced principals in a large number of isolated country areas. This position is compounded by the fact that fewer candidates for rural educational positions have come from a rural backgrounds. The implications for teacher education may mean that particular studies

may need to be carried out by aspiring rural teachers and principals that emphasise aspects of rurality or learning how to establish effective working relationships with communities and their groups. There is a need for aspiring appointees to rural principalships to find out about their prospective communities in terms of history, and to learn who will be the likely candidates to assist them in their new roles as the “boundary crossers,” which Kirkpatrick, Cheers, Gilles and Taylor (2009, p. 284) found to be critical for establishing initial productive contacts within their new community in health leadership and other community leadership roles.

The second main finding was that context was also important for curriculum and that a local curriculum was necessary particularly in the smaller schools. This will be discussed in the following section.

5.1.2 Context was important for local curriculum

The strong productive relationships between the school community and the wider community of rural schools as perceived by respondents in this study were a direct result of schools having established a local curriculum that used the community and environs as its underpinning principle. Encouraged by the present climate of school based curriculum development, and a natural proclivity for caring for their environment, most rural schools in Otago (93%) have established a unique curriculum sympathetic to, and incorporating many aspects reliant on their rural locations. Critical to this content was their environment. Many of the schools in the survey were happy to comment on these aspects, for example, “Our curriculum tends to follow the seasonal approach affected by our farming district, as in haymaking or calving and those kinds of things.” (Small rural

school respondent to survey section on rural context). Principals of both small and larger rural schools recognised that the revised New Zealand focus, in combination with where they were, affected their particular curricula. “They probably got that mandate now with the new revised curriculum to make their school programmes reflect what is out there in their community...it [the new curriculum] acknowledges the fact that things are different from Hokianga harbour or Central Otago.” (larger rural school principal A).

The factors of environment and community affecting curriculum were explored in more detail in the interviews and confirmed the importance of locality and environment, especially for the smaller schools. For example, the coastal school (U1) in the study had established a large core of topics for inquiry based on a marine environment, utilising local expertise both from with the parental group and within the local district. For a Central Otago school (U3), however, the emphasis in the curriculum took in aspects of adventure sports, and featured a large block of time devoted to learning and developing skill in snow sports for the whole school. For a small school with a high proportion of Māori students (U1), the curriculum was about establishing content and programmes featuring their local iwi (tribes), and their local Maori history imprint, through establishing strong connections with their local whanau (families) and runaka (tribal group).

For these schools, local physical and historical environments were the contexts controlling the content of their curriculum for their area and the important core for their students to learn about and to make inquiries within. Involving the community was not just a means to ensure support, but a vital part of supplying content and validity to what their students would learn about.

A criticism of curriculum this localised has been that it would not serve the student anywhere else if the student moved away. Principals, however, are aware of this criticism, and structure the learning in such a way that it becomes a process as much as a product, and therefore, can be repeated by the student independently to manage content and learning in a different environment. The inquiry approach is one such learning process which small schools and others have taken on board for this reason. The inquiry approach (Murdoch & Wilson, 2004 ; Rapp (2005) teaches students to develop questions about the chosen topic which will result in information being sought through a variety of sources to answer the questions posed. The approach is broken into various stages which require certain actions such as developing questions in the initial stages to making comparisons and relating it to their own environment in the final stages. The information sought and found is processed by the student to answer the questions, to immerse themselves in the topic, and to develop innovative ways of presenting their findings and comparing these findings to other learning. It thus becomes a process for developing knowledge about a range of subjects which the learner is interested in and the process can be transferred to develop other learning and to make other comparisons in the taking it further stage. The process is not subject specific and is very motivating for students.

Principals, particularly of small schools, were happy to comment in the survey about community reactions to local curriculum content. They indicated that it not only took time but was a shared enterprise. “They really feel that we are part and parcel of the community” (U1 school principal comment in survey section on rural context). “We are all on the same page, even the kids, because we have worked on it together as a whole school community and they feel we are upholding our local history and community” (U2

small school principal comment in survey). Larger rural schools, too, felt that it was important to work with local ideas. “You take your own environment to display your vision...by not rushing it – taking the time to listen and share ideas” (U4 principal commenting in survey). Ninety percent of principals in the survey indicated that the community had had an effect on curriculum design. Over 90% of surveyed principals agreed that there was an increasing positive impact in the community by schools using a local curriculum. In the literature review, it was reported that a positive impact by schools was important for community development and sustainability (Beckner, 1996; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000; Wright, 2007). Learning about their local area created a bond for students and they were more likely to return to spend their adult lives in the community than to look elsewhere. Community leaders respected this and were keen to create conditions that would reinforce a return of their younger members as this, too, would lead to sustainability of the community in the future.

Small rural school principals also noted the close consultation with students about their vision, the curriculum, and its direction and relevance:

One of the most powerful things for me – working with the children – on our mission statement and what it means to them and then going from that to our vision – what they really need to be learning...that has been really powerful for me and it’s been really powerful for the board as well...I think it’s helped them [the board] verbalise what was important for the pupils here. (Small school principal C)

Another small school principal added that “children are an integral part of the planning...children have been very involved in this process of developing an integrated

curriculum...we always do it with the children” (U2 principal F). Working with students in this way was found in the literature (Chalker, 1999; Johns et al., 2002; Robinson, 2009; Theobald, 1997) to be a powerful means of providing “ownership,” which in turn reinforced a commitment to not just the school but the community as well and a vital means of motivation for learning and empowering for the students.

Research found that curriculum based on community is relevant to the students’ lives, and therefore powerfully engaging and motivating (Stapleton, 2010; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000). Similarly in this study, it was recognised that local curriculum was relevant, particularly in the smaller schools:

The kids are interested, too, because they can see it happening right out there affecting them. It’s what they are living, too, so it’s not alienating to them. I think that’s so important and I think it’s why our kids are so engaged. (Small school principal D).

Results from the survey showed that principals recognised that local curriculum produced visible results of engagement and achievement. Over 93% of the principals surveyed agreed on its visible impact and the same number responded positively on the fact that local curriculum developed an appreciation of place. The small rural school principals who had used student input found that it was immensely empowering for the children and that they (the children) could rise to the occasion. “I’ve taken it [the children’s work on curriculum] to the board and they were amazed that children would come up with those things.... It was really, really amazing” (Small school principal C).

Another principal added:

We will use the children as the beginning point...and then we will often come back to them and say, 'Well this is what everybody said. What do you think?' so it puts the power in the children's hands and the direction of the curriculum too and so it has a local flavour to it. (Small school principal F)

It can be seen from these findings that context is indeed critical for leadership practices, and that small rural school principals enact these practices in ways and emphases different from those in their larger school counterparts. Context is critical for curriculum too, as it influences, and in some circumstances almost mandates, the content of the school's curriculum. This is most noticeable in the smaller rural schools.

Students who see that they have control over their learning are empowered by this control to create conditions conducive for their learning, by suggesting content, by being able to find out about the content of their curriculum personally, and by having direct influence on it. Such inclusion must seem to some to suggest that they, too, are able and active learners rather than being subjected to and perhaps overwhelmed by content that they do not understand or for which they do not know the source. Externally imposed curricula may even suggest, as they have in the past, that rural living is deficient both for living conditions and for learning, in comparison to the superior urban and larger contexts. The mantra, "Big is Best" that they see displayed on their television screens and in many government policies is an antithesis to what they live daily. Many rural students who know their own environment intimately through their local curriculum, may view an urban environment as empty, lifeless, scary, and unmanageable. Their small environment, on the other hand, can seem manageable through its familiar segments that are conducive to learning and through being able to have some control over the content.

Principals from urban schools coming from environments that locate their curriculum in the national sense, and sometimes even global sense, may initially look at a local curriculum as too narrow, until they are able to sample the potential depth of the content. They may perceive the local curriculum as returning to an earlier era focussed on living off the land, but with the expansion of information technology (IT) and the technology associated with distance learning, this no longer need apply. However, coming into a rural environment for many principals even today can be compared to immigrants of earlier times. They, like their predecessors, have to find means of integration into what may appear to be a different culture and value system, not least of which is a local curriculum.

Research has found that small schools, such as those found in rural areas have many advantages, among them being smaller classes, more attention for individual learners from teachers, closer relationships with both teachers and community members, more control over their learning which is less alienated from their everyday lives, and a curriculum that celebrates where they live (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Chalker 1999; T. Collins, 2001; Nachtigal, 1994; O'Neal & Cox, 2002; Theobald 1995). There are wide ranging implications from the perceived importance of a local curriculum, which affect a number of interested groups in rural schools. These implications will be discussed in the next section.

This research for this project focused on the interrelationships among the principal as leader, a local curriculum, and the community, for the success and effectiveness of the school within a rural environment, and as such posed four research questions. The research findings and discussion related to these questions follows in the next section.

5.2 Implications From Findings Related to the Research Questions

This section presents each research question in turn, followed by a discussion of the results and their implications as related to each research question.

5.2.1 Research question 1.

To what extent is effectiveness in rural schools a function of interactions within the system (context), that is, the interrelated dimensions of the principal and their leadership in a rural area, the school and its adopted curriculum, and the relationship with the wider community?

Overall, findings from this research from the survey initially, and confirmed by the interviews, indicated that effectiveness in rural schools, especially in small rural schools, is indeed a function of interactions among the principal, the curriculum, and the principal's relationship with the wider community.

Respondents considered effective principals of small schools to be those who were quality teachers, who enjoyed living in rural areas, and who had personal characteristics that allowed them to relate to others readily and easily, and who had the expertise to develop a curriculum that engaged their learners, and earned the ongoing support of their communities. Rural school principals were found in this research project to be using the four core leadership practices found to be effective elsewhere. These four basic sets of leadership practices have been identified as setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organisation, and managing the instructional (teaching and learning) programme (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1998, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006b; Robinson et al., 2009). Implications for aspiring rural school

principals suggest that they must be familiar with, and be able to use the core leadership practices found in research to lead to school achievement and success. This research project found that not only did principals respond using these core leadership practices but that these practices differed in enactment between small and large schools. All of the small schools had teaching principals, and therefore these principals were more conversant with, and implemented more frequently leadership practices associated with managing the teaching and instruction programmes and were more likely than their larger school counterparts to have had discussions with staff revolving around curriculum. They were less likely, on the other hand, because of numbers of staff to be employing distributed leadership than larger schools and less likely to be using practices associated with developing people. Principals of smaller schools were more likely to undertake the professional development of staff personally by instigating workshops which they would lead and by taking an active part in the teaching programmes of their staff. Larger school principals tended to opt more for outside “experts” or agencies to organise professional development and were less likely to engage staff in conversations about curriculum.

The rural principal is critical in determining first, whether the school is effective and second, that there is a local curriculum. Local curriculum is in nearly all cases designed and implemented by the principal. In turn, the presence or otherwise of a local curriculum determines the degree and extent of support from the local community. How this local curriculum is settled on, and implemented, determines whether the school is effective within its local community through its content. To be effective, the content of the curriculum must emphasise local input and history, which in turn translates into support by the community for the school and its endeavours. All three components,

principal, local curriculum, and community support are vital; the absence of any one, while not resulting in failure denies success, in that the school equates to being perceived by the community as being a less effective school. Results from the survey and interviews showed that a local curriculum is less a requirement in the larger rural schools, although principals in these schools were quick to point out that they ensured that their curriculum contained elements from the local area, whether through the development of a sports curriculum, or through the inclusion of research into local history. Principals of larger rural schools recognised the potency of including items of local interest, both for their students and for their communities.

Local curriculum varied according to the locale of each school. The locale of the school included the physical environment, which varied from coastal fringes to alpine locations, and the influence that this environment had on their curriculum content was noticeable. Examples included marine based content of schools based near the coast to that which emphasised settlement by gold miners or farmers for inland Otago. Each locale, and therefore the content for each local curriculum, took into account their own personal community history, and celebrated events of importance from that history. Schools using “place-based education” in the United States of America, and advocates for place-based education elsewhere (see Sobel, 2005, and Orr, 1994), and for example, Gruenwald (2003a; 2003b) in Scandanavia, used the same principles of using the community as curriculum and therefore local history and environs were very important for developing content.

Support from communities was obvious in the presence of parents and community members at school events, and in the financial assistance the schools invariably received

to pursue their programmes. This took the form of fundraising for the transport to skifields for winter physical education programmes, to annual camps as far away as Wellington, to providing uniforms for school teams competing in outside sporting events. Support for rural schools generally was found in the research (Chalker, 1999; Nachtigal, 1994; Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995; Wright, 2007). Research from the United States found that where schools were using “place-based” education, there was the same degree of community involvement and support (see e.g., Orr, 1994; Sobel, 2005). It can be seen from the literature review chapter that place-based education is just another term for local curriculum and that it is very prominent in the United States of America (Sobel, 2005; Beeson & Strange, 2003). In this project, the interaction of the principal who was responsible for the instigation of local curriculum, as well as establishing positive relationships with the community, thus ensuring community involvement and support, was critical. Effective principals were those who were perceived to be leading their schools into using local content in their programmes. This has implications for principals to make sure that the local community is aware of how this is happening in the school’s programmes and that they are using local community “expertise” as much as possible. Principals need to make use of their community “spies”, as one of the interviewed principals put it, to ensure that the community are kept aware of the school’s programmes. For some schools this may mean the use of drop offs by the local rural delivery to ensure all members are receiving information. Aspiring principals need to be aware of the significant time commitment to keep up to date with current developments in the area of local curriculum, and can find suggestions for programmes in the increasing publications of place-based education providers or from trawling the Internet for school

events that have proved popular and successful elsewhere. Opportunities will also arrive locally through community planned events. An attendance at local community meetings becomes a requirement if the principal doesn't have spies.

Responses in the survey about community support indicated that where principals were personally involved in the community, there was a much higher perception of effectiveness of the school, and where there was also a local curriculum in place, indications were that community support and perception of effectiveness were highest. Community support was confirmed in the interviews as being critical to success. Principals mentioned that critical factors for success related to the establishment of trust and good relationships with community, and particularly with their own Board of Trustees. Several principals mentioned the factor of time. "To develop trust takes time" was a sentiment expressed frequently, as was the critical need for local knowledge and not rushing in to change things. Indications of support were taken from numbers attending school events, being involved in school programmes such as class programmes, and outdoor education events such as school camps, and direct financial contributions from groups such as the PTA (parent teacher associations) and fundraising committees. Although again intruding on the balance of work and life style commitments, it appears that rural principals do need to be personally involved in a range of community endeavours for the ultimate benefit of their school in rural contexts. Aspiring principals who come from a rural background will have an understanding of what this means, from membership of local sports teams to other groups found in the community. For female principals who are also parents, it can present another obstacle to overcome in terms of time spent away from the family.

Having a professional support network was reported as important by principals in the interviews in the smaller (U1 – U3) schools, as was an affinity with the environment, and knowing the power brokers who wield influence over others:

Making sure that somehow you can get involved in a professional support network as a rural principals is important whether that be a cluster that's around you or an artificially little, made up group – like the ones they have in town [referring to Dunedin]. (Small school principal C)

For large school principals, it was important to know not just the people but the rural environment as well, especially in terms of seasonal variations, which might affect the attendance of pupils. A number of rural families keep older students at home during busy times such as hay making to help with the increase in duties. “Learning people’s first names so that everything is personal, and understanding rural commitments is important” (Large school principal, D referring to such incidents).

Major implications arise when the principal, for whatever reason, falls out with the community. In terms of effectiveness in the rural educational sector they may as well resign, as until trust and relationships are restored, nothing will progress even though their local curriculum may be established and accepted. Small school prinipals recognised this in their interviews. “If they have lost their community trust , they will not be able to achieve anything, they may as well go away; that is, resign” (Small school principal B). Where these events have become public, as in a bad ERO report or failing school, it has nearly always been reported as having involved broken relationships between the principal and the community (See, e.g., reports in Otago Daily Times, June, 2002; ERO, 1999, see also Thrupp, 1998)

Implications for new appointees are to be able to establish close and confidential relationships with community members for that all important feedback and to be proactive when they are told there is a problem.

5.2.2 Research question 2.

Which professional leadership practices have been identified as being important by rural primary principals in Otago?

The six principals in the interviews responded that professional practices that would be most effective would be similar to those in all other schools, not just rural schools. They would include shared beliefs about teaching and learning, common values that were visible, and articulated, all alongside a supportive teaching environment in which instruction was individualised and met the students' needs.

The leadership practices that were identified as being important were affected in large measure by the critical key finding that context matters – leadership practices differed not just from school to school but that these practices were affected by the size of the school. Practices in small rural schools centred around teaching and learning. Implications from research by Robinson et al. (2009), were that the closer leadership practices were to the core job of schools, that is, teaching and learning, the more effective the school was for improving student achievement. Perhaps as a result of mainly being teaching principal schools, that is, where the principal held a major role in the teaching programmes, small rural schools focused more closely on such leadership practices as monitoring student achievement and monitoring school curriculum goals as compared to their larger counterparts.

The implications here are that new principals are conversant with current practices in assessment and how these relate to improvement in achievement as well as teaching and learning. Professional conversations with staff about curriculum were a corollary to this practice, and were also found more often in small schools than in their larger school counterparts. Curriculum responsibility in the large schools tended to reside in personnel other than the principal. It was not investigated whether staff then approached these other leaders for curriculum advice or had professional conversations with them over curriculum. For new and aspiring principals there is an implication that they will require the necessary background knowledge through professional readings and attendance at professional workshops to be able to undertake these practices, which have a pathway in the core leadership practice of developing people. The results indicated that the other core practices of setting directions, redesigning the organisation, and managing the instructional programme were enacted in different ways and had a different emphasis in each of the types of schools. Setting directions, for example, in small rural schools involved the school principal and staff in debate with the community about a local curriculum more often than was found for their larger rural school counterparts and as it also involved the daily teaching component found in these schools had a much heavier emphasis overall. This was borne out by results of observations which depicted the small school principals as having a heavy component of setting directions through their teaching component. Redesigning the organisation for smaller schools was less familiar and not as easy as in large schools who had larger staff numbers to take into account, and therefore, could develop a variety of arrangements for both teaching purposes and professional development, from syndicates where several year levels of the school worked

together, to whanau (family) grouping, to ability streaming. For smaller rural schools, interpersonal staff relationships were more critical. Managing the instructional programme for larger rural schools often meant moves into distributed leadership, and management of curriculum strengths through strengths of staff, which were less prominent in smaller rural schools with fewer staff. What this often affects was that most problems in smaller rural schools tend to be centred around curriculum and communications with parents, whereas in the larger rural schools, issues centred around solving problems associated with personnel.

5.2.3 Research question 3.

The third research question was, How are professional leadership practices put into effect by rural principals to establish effective partnerships with their communities?

Results from the survey related to this research question meant that practices relating to partnerships with communities varied less between large and small schools than those related to leadership practices overall. Practices were similar, for both large and small rural schools, and emphasised good and regular communication. Face to face contact was recognised as the lynchpin for all schools, again featuring the “boundary crossers”, but critically important was parent contact, especially for smaller schools. Results from the survey indicated, which were confirmed in the interviews that they had contact with parents on most days. Outside of school events, particularly sporting occasions and cultural events, were recognised as vital for developing successful relationships in both large and small school communities. This has implications for the lifestyle balance experienced by principals between their private lives and their positions

and explains why some find it difficult to reconcile the two. It also contributes to small rural communities preferences for male principals, who can be involved in local sporting fixtures as playing members more readily than their female counterparts, who may also have family responsibilities and restricted free time as a result. (Personal communication from rural BOT chairperson). The perception is that dads have an easier conduit to take part in school events. Principals interviewed noted a similar demarcation in the contact that their parents have with the school. Generally for dads it is sport, annual outdoor camps, and sports related activities; whereas, the mums tend to be found taking part in classroom programmes or cultural events. Traditionally, classroom programmes have featured parental input in rural schools, with many rural schools widening this group to include grandparents and other available community members. Principals found this contact by parents lessened with the age of the child, except for attendance at camps.

Implications for principals vary, according to the design and intensity of the parental input to the classroom programmes. For most, it was just an awareness of who was coming, and when, and the timely expression of thanks. For other principals, who actively engaged their parents in more involved ways, it meant extra time spent planning for parental involvement and appropriate activities during the time spent in the class, and ensuring that these parents were comfortable in their role and understood what it was they were assisting with, as well as communicating an understanding of confidentiality that attended these involvements, especially in the smaller communities.

Context mainly related to size, affected the professional practices of rural school principals. Communications with parents and community for both small and large rural schools emphasised the importance of face-to-face communication and the role of

communication overall. Different strategies were noted, such as afternoon sessions, weekend meetings, and curriculum content emphasising different occupations to attract fathers to become involved in the more day-to-day interactions and classroom programmes, as opposed to the more formal membership on Boards of Trustees. The interviews demonstrated that principals were aware of the difficulties surrounding contributions of fathers. Communication is critical for rural schools, as it is for schools in other contexts; however, for rural schools to develop a local curriculum, communication in a number of ways becomes a catalyst for this to happen.

5.2.4 Research question 4.

The fourth research question was, *What professional practices and processes have successful rural principals found to be most effective for implementing a local curriculum? How are the effects of a local curriculum manifested?*

All principals in this study reported that implementing a local curriculum took time and involved extensive consultation of all groups, including students. This was confirmed in the interviews. The most successful communication method for smaller schools was a mixture of both formal and informal measures, for example, an informal gathering might be followed by a more formal workshops. Larger rural school principals found it more expedient to use outside facilitators, as they did for professional development with staff.

Implications arose mainly for the smaller school principals to be familiar with the material to be presented if they were running the workshop, and to have a number of activities ready that would “break the ice” if this was an unfamiliar activity for the

community. All schools were aware of the greater difficulty of involving fathers in consultations and had come up with innovative ideas for doing so, including a standard strategy of using weekends for meetings. Other than these arranged meetings, implications for principals were the same as for research question 3; developing effective relationships with the community again of critical importance, as well as a need to develop personal characteristics that led readily to establishing positive personal working relationships with the various interested parties. A further implication was to know, or to have some idea, of what sort of shape and focus the local curriculum would be taking, so that relevant questions and concerns could be answered, and sources of future resources explored.

The range of strategies used by both small and large schools for implementing curriculum involved using formal methods of workshops, as well as the more informal open visiting formulas for introducing parents and community to what was happening in the classrooms. Larger rural school principals tended to use outside facilitators to convey the messages of the new curriculum,. This had the additional problem of having these facilitators viewed as outside experts dictating ways forward without a knowledge of the rural context. Smaller rural school principals circumvented this potential problem by using local staff, and by using the local curriculum examples, which they had formulated in consultation with their community, and which they wanted to showcase to their community by opening the classroom/school for visits.

All principals recognised the potency of daily contact through before and after school meetings with the “school gate committee” (a name given to the collection of parents who drive their children to and from school and who often congregate to “chat”

to other parents while waiting for children to arrive) for distributing messages about the school and its achievements, and for discovering any issues percolating in the community. Similarly, the opportunity to meet and discuss with fathers on sports sidelines on weekends was valued by both small and large school principals. Implications were that it was appreciated if the principal had at least a working knowledge of the sport and could thus discuss what was happening in a cogent manner. This had more implications for female principals, particularly when it came to viewing and discussing rugby, both locally and nationally. Great store was put in being able to at least discuss these games with some relevant knowledge. “I am often asked what I thought about the weekends’ results. I’ll have to bone up before the cup!” (Small school principal B. referring to local and national rugby matches and the world rugby cup to take place in New Zealand in 2012).

Time was reported as an important factor by all principals not just for developing trust with their community partnerships, but also for embedding understanding of the new curriculum, and particularly, the new concept of competencies. “I would spend time on the key competencies - really drawing them out...not just looking at what they are, but linking them in to values and principles” (Large school principal D). The same sorts of comments were made by small school principal interviewees, who were also anxious to keep their present BOT, because of the perception they (the BOT) were finally understanding the implications and involvement required for implementing a new curriculum.

All six interviewees recognised the child-centred focus of their curriculum. For small schools principals, local curriculum meant almost total local content, influenced by

where the school was situated, for example, the marine focus for the school situated on the coast and the outdoor pursuits curriculum of the inland school. For the large school principals, a recognition of place-centred topics, local history, and local interests were pertinent.

Implications for new appointees again pointed to gaining knowledge of the local area and investigating its previous history. It seems that this is most easily done by living locally and so the trend of living outside the catchment area of the school that was noticeable in the survey results might work against this aspect, and new appointees might need to re-think where their home location would best be situated. Although most principals were happy with their progress with implementation of the new curriculum, they would also prefer more resources in the form of more allocated teacher time or release time to prepare further hard data resources.

Results from the survey, supported by results from both observations and interviews, show that the critical triad explored in research question 1 is indeed critical. Effective rural schools are a result of an effective principal who is able to engage positively with the school's community and gains the necessary support for the school through the implementation of a local curriculum featuring the locale and history of the school's environs. The absence of any one of these three factors, while not guaranteeing failure, will deny the school success as an effective school. Leadership practices found in the rural schools emulate the four practices found in research to be critical for success. Small school principals however, enact these in varying ways and with a different emphasis than those principals in the large rural schools, but factors found which lead to success were similar. Methods of establishing positive relationships with communities

for both large and small schools were similar, and both groups of principals recognised the need for the sustained primary contact through face-to-face contacts which they considered the most powerful. Informal occasions proved to be the most likely to succeed for maintaining this contact. All schools were in the process of implementing a new and “unique” curriculum which given the drive by the MOE, was not surprising. Small school principals were emphasising the local content of their curriculum more than the large school principals. However, large school principals had taken note of the need to include local topics and material.

5.3 Implications From the Perceived Importance of a Local Curriculum

The main implication is for aspiring appointees, who must get themselves quickly up to speed with an in depth knowledge of their new local area, which will ultimately influence the shape of the school’s curriculum, not just through its geography but through its history and the very locality in which it is situated. This was most obvious in the curriculum of the small rural coastal school, which focused almost entirely on its marine environment for curriculum content. Boards of Trustees will need to ensure that their new principals have the opportunity to find out about their local environs and community. They can do this through engaging the new appointee while retaining the outgoing principal for a period of time, for example, some weeks or ideally a term. This will provide time for the outgoing principal to mentor the new principal into the job. Board members would also have a responsibility to assist, through their own intimate knowledge of community matters or through introducing the ideal people for their new principal to meet as the “boundary crossers” of their locale. A core of these community

members, who are local to the area or have lived in the area for a significant time, or who have some significant expertise relevant to the local area, could be formed as an advisory committee until the new principal becomes familiar with the area. This could also be facilitated by the outgoing principal as part of an exit procedure. Related to this, the new appointee would benefit from living in the local area at least initially, even though this is a situation that is becoming less common and less ideal for a number of reasons. For example, an item that is often of critical importance for new appointees to know the kin relationships of the community in which they will be working (Clarke, 2002; Clarke & Wildly, 2004). These are the kinds of critical information that can be passed on to the incoming new appointee, which can make the transition more harmonious for all concerned.

In contrast, however, research from Scotland (Wilson & McPake, 1998, 2000) and Australia (Clarke, 2002; Clarke & Wildly, 2004) has shown that living in the local area for small school principals makes finding a balance between private lives and their jobs very difficult. They often feel as if they are living in a glass fishbowl. This was highlighted in the interviews with principals in this study as well.

An intimate and thorough knowledge of the new, New Zealand curriculum is important for the new principal, as it is for all new principals in New Zealand schools. However, new rural principals may require some training in developing a local school based curriculum. This also has implications for education training providers, to ensure that the development of curriculum, and even more pertinent, school based curriculum development, is included in their curriculum for study. This research study also emphasised the relational aspects that the new appointee would need to develop in

interpersonal relationships, as well as the characteristics of flexibility, open-mindedness, and ability to quickly establish mutual, positive working relationships with a range of other groups within the community. If the new appointee can show a willingness to take personal responsibility for developing these characteristics, it will assist in the initial meetings found critical in Clarke (2002) and Clarke and Wildly's research (2004) for developing long-term positive relationships in their new locale. There is an implication of commitment in the foregoing, and an implication of time needed to establish the ongoing, reciprocal, trustful, relationships, both of which presume that the new appointee will not be a short appointment before moving on, but has a long-term commitment to the appointment. This expectation can even extend to the new principal's family being established in the area as well, as a sign of intended longevity. For many new appointees this expectation will be coloured by the community's experiences in the past, not always the most fortunate in small rural schools. Advice from long term appointees in this study has been that time and care should be taken to establish themselves first and foremost as quality teachers, and not to rush in with a new broom to change things such as routines, topics of study, etc., particularly if these have worked well and contributed to the perceived success of the school. Wilson and McPake (1998) found that having excellent teaching skills was highly related to the eventual successful integration of incoming principals into the local communities.

A local curriculum underpinned by careful and extensive consultation has been shown to be motivating to students and supported by community, and conducive to a feeling of ownership by students and community, which in turn underpins improved relationships between school and community, and improved achievement for students, in

a positive cycle of mutual recognition. A local curriculum does not exclude new possibilities or directions nor does it exclude change, as these can be incorporated with consultation and forethought in line with change in the community and the possibilities opened by new technologies. For some the local curriculum can be a way of introducing change particularly through new technologies.

5.4 Findings Related to the Research

Results from the observations and interviews attested to the fact that all principals used the four core leadership practices found by research to be essential for all effective schools (Leithwood, 2002; Waters, Marzano & McNulty (2003). How these were enacted however was qualitatively different from the small schools to large rural schools, a result found also by Collins (2003) in his earlier research with principals in new zealand schools, but not present in the literature of other countries with small rural schools.

Themes found in the results of the interviews were replications of themes found in rural research in a number of other countries. Rural schools in New Zealand in this research had established close connections with their communities as elsewhere for example in America (Cotton, 2000; Fisk 2002; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Johns, et al., 2002; Raftery & Mulkey, 1989), in Australia (Clarke, 2002 and Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Gurr et al., 2005) and in Scotland (Wilson 2007; Wilson & McPake 1998). They (rural principals) like their counterparts in other countries, found workload and stress difficult to resolve, and like other principals found the double bind of management and leadership a burden (Clarke, 2002; Livingstone, 1999; Wilson & McPake 1998; Wylie, 1997). Results from observations attested to the significant amounts of time that principals spent on administration and other aspects of school leadership other than teaching. Curriculum

responsibility, particularly for small schools, was important in developing a local curriculum which for these schools was an essential component of an effective school (Wright, 2003). For large rural schools, a local component was still essential but with a larger staff, principals were able to delegate some responsibility to curriculum leaders (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Context was important for this study as it was elsewhere. (Clarke, 2002; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Robinson et al, 2004; Southworth, 2002; Wilson, 2007).

Principals in New Zealand in this research were, like those in Scotland (Wilson, 2007, Wilson & McPake, 1998), more satisfied and happier in their roles, than those found in earlier research (Livingstone, 1999, Wilson & McPake 1998).

Effective rural schools fit the community and are consistent with the characteristics of rural life so that events pertinent to rural areas are incorporated within the classroom environment, and related curriculum is used to support these events (Beckner 1996; Wright, 2003). Evidence was found in the survey, the interviews and in the observations to support this finding. Rural schools in this research were involved in rural events such as A & P shows, Pet Days, and through topics in their local curriculum involved in the local environment and local history.

All of the principals agreed that both men and women should be encouraged to attain higher qualifications.

The three small school principals felt that this finding showed bias in the profession. There was a general perception that young males are earmarked for a principal's position without basic strengths and experience to be gained through further

study. This perception is borne out by the research on appointments to principalship made by Brooking (2003). She commented that:

In New Zealand the future does not look so optimistic. Here where boards have total control over their choice of principal, men are disproportionately represented. In primary schools women represent 82% of the workforce, but are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership, occupying only 40% of principal positions. Seen from another perspective, 60% of principals are appointed from the 18% male pool of the workforce, (Ministry of Education 2002). Men are six times more likely to win a principal's position disregarding experience or qualifications, than women. In addition, 80% of senior management positions in primary schools (assistant and deputy principals) are held by women (Ministry of Education 2002), indicating that there is a very large pool of well qualified and experienced women who may be hitting a glass ceiling. (Brooking, 2003, p. 1)

Characteristics and qualities of the principals interviewed, and their responses to factors, and characteristics such as flexibility, integrity, passion, and enthusiasm that they thought would be important for a rural context mirrored those found in research, alongside high expectations of students and a belief that schools could make a difference found in research on successful rural leadership (Gurr et al., 2006; Southworth, 2002), and expressed in this research in results from the survey and interviews. Small and large school principals were in agreement with their Scottish counterparts that small schools needed to be "talked up" in an era of school closures and an atmosphere of distrust of government intentions (Wilson, 2007, p. 54).

Demographics in this research were similar to those found in Scotland (Wilson, 2007) and the United Kingdom (Soutworth, 2002). Principals tend to be female, between 35– 50 yrs of age. It seems clear that the smaller the school the more likely the principal is female. During the first 10 years of principalship, principals tended to be mobile, with a number of principals intending to move to non teaching positions in the near future. Few principals were appointed straight from the classroom with most having some position of responsibility before appointment. The most likely appointments were from previous DP positions. Principals tended to live outside their catchment area as they did in Scotland (Wilson & McPake, 1998), but fewer of the principals came from a rural background than those in Scotland.

5.5 Limitations of this research

The results from this research study into the the professional practices of principals of rural schools in the Otago region may partly be attributed to the fact that it is a small, defined region (relatively speaking in area, compared to, for example, rural school districts in Australia), and as such, variations in practice may be smaller than might be expected, especially as face to face communications and other professional contact through strong local networks is quite regular. This also leads to a number of limitations to the research findings. The primary limitation to this research arises because the research itself was conducted in one area of New Zealand only; it may not be possible to generalise results to other areas of New Zealand or to rural areas of other countries.

The respondent pool to the survey were principals only, of all the rural schools in Otago. However, as the research was concerned with questions of principals' practice,

they were, in essence, the only respondents who could be considered representative within that geographic area. While it is generally accepted that principals have integrity and will answer questions honestly, some triangulation of data was carried out using interviews and observations. A number of respondent principals were also teaching principals, which may have affected their responses regarding professional practices. Principals to be interviewed were purposively chosen to give an even spread throughout the different locations in Otago, and a range of small and large schools in each area. Purposively chosen respondents preclude random choice, and therefore may present a bias within the data. The interviewer was also the researcher, who collected and analysed the data, with a possible consequence of further researcher bias, despite best attempts to avoid this confound.

Likert scales were used as a response within the survey. Although Likert scales give an indication of level of support for any given question that can then be summed and averaged, whether this information is rigorous enough is open to question (Achyar, 2008).

The survey included all rural schools, but numbers were still relatively small for research purposes. In addition, the schools themselves had very small rolls, relative to most other schools throughout the Western world. Although roll numbers are on a par with rural schools in other remote places in Australia, Scotland, and some areas of the United States of America, the difference with these almost comparable schools is that New Zealand is possibly one of the few educational systems left in the world that has sole-charge/one room schools. (Statistics New Zealand, 2006)

5.6 Contribution of this study

This study makes several new contributions to the literature on leadership in rural schools. First, the research was carried out in a rural context and as such contributes to research and knowledge in this area, which has had few attempts at close examination. The findings demonstrated that context is critical. Professional leadership practice was different between that of small rural school principals and large rural school principals, not just as a consequence of the smaller schools generally having teaching principals, but also as a result of the context of the school roll being small. This was a significant finding confirming that of Collins (2004); and not found elsewhere in the literature on leadership.

Secondly, the study addressed some of the gaps in the current knowledge regarding small school leadership. As Southworth (2002) found, “The contemporary literature is far stronger in prescribing such leadership than it is in describing it” (p. 76). This research demonstrated and described the complexity of small school leadership, and the additional complications of small, rural school leadership, thus supporting and extending the previous research findings of small rural school leadership from Australia (Clarke & Wildly, 2004) and in Scotland (Wilson & McPake, 1998) to the New Zealand rural context.

Third, in a unique finding, the research explored and demonstrated the critical nature of local curriculum for small rural schools in New Zealand. The support of the community in small rural school catchments, and ultimately the perceived effectiveness of those schools, depended to a large extent on the fact that these schools had developed a

curriculum that incorporated its local community and environs as curriculum content. In this research no small school was found that did not have, or had not used, the local community and environs as curriculum. In addition, the principals who were interviewed confirmed that the few schools that had not developed a local curriculum in the past had, after poor ERO reports regarding community support and commitment, changed their content to include local curriculum and had then received better ERO reports regarding their communities' support. Confirmation of such findings is also evident in the local community support reported in American research for place-based education (Beckner, 1996; Chalker, 1999 ; Miller, 1995; Otero & West Burnham, 2005).

Fourth, the research showed that it is the interrelationships of the important triad of leadership, curriculum, and community that was perceived to lead to the development and maintenance of effective schools in a rural context. This is a new finding, in that this research establishes for the first time that curriculum may need to be placed on an equal par with leadership, as a component of being an effective rural school in small rural schools.

Fifth, the research contributed the development of a survey that can be used by other researchers in the field of leadership research in an educational context. The survey was found to have good psychometric qualities, as demonstrated by the results of the factor analysis and reliability statistics for the subscales obtained. Future research that uses this survey will provide ongoing evidence of its validity. The design of the survey itself is unique, in that it provides data on the practices that rural principals find important on two levels: personal practice and perceived importance. Thus, the survey permits

comparison between actual practice – what is happening in reality, and perceived ideal practice - what principals would like to have occurring in an ideal world.

In summary, it is hoped that this study might be useful for informing both future policy direction and principalship practice in New Zealand, to the benefit of small rural school principals. The finding that a local curriculum assumes such a degree of importance highlights for aspiring rural school principals that they will indeed need to know and understand the complexities and history of their community in order to incorporate this content into their local school curriculum. The finding that professional leadership practices differentiated between large and small rural schools should inform the future practices of new rural educational leaders, and should be included in the curriculum of not just leadership providers, but also the programmes of providers for all aspiring rural teachers.

Several recommendations arise from the findings of this research that are pertinent to a number of stakeholders in rural education. These are discussed in the next section.

5.7 Recommendations

Recommendations for rural principals arising from this research are grounded in the notion that developing and establishing a local curriculum is of critical importance. In this section, recommendations based on the findings from this research are presented for aspiring rural principals, for leadership courses, and for education training providers.

5.7.1 For aspiring rural principals.

Those who aspire to a rural principalship should:

- Find out about their local area – its history and environs and the events considered important within it. This means that they need to commit to travelling about in their local community to understand its environment and locale or even to commit to living locally at least for a time after the initial appointment.
- Establish positive, ongoing relationships with the “boundary crossers” in their local area. Becoming familiar with the research of Johns et al. (2002) on how to establish such relationships will assist with these efforts.
- Make a commitment to developing personality traits that lead to the establishment of good relationships with those in the community. These traits include...flexibility, approachability, emotional intelligence, humour, people skills and communication skills (Southworth, 2002; Wilson & McPake, 2000).
- Put into place sustainability procedures and succession practices that will allow for the training of other staff as future principals.
- Keep up with current research findings about core professional practices that lead to effective schools.

5.7.2 For leadership courses

In addition to teacher training and leadership management it is recommended that leadership courses for those aspiring to leadership in rural schools will contain current research information about, and practice in:

- How to establish and develop localised curriculum.
- How to establish and develop effective and productive working relationships

with parents and the community.

- Training and opportunity to practice core leadership practices.

5.7.3 For educational training providers.

Just as there needs to be training for aspiring educational leaders, training for rural teachers in planning and developing local curriculum projects should become another focus for training providers for rural teachers and those involved in rural education so that rural principals can rely on stable staff who understand a rural context. For principals it also means that they have staff with the skills to create programmes within the local curriculum. Perhaps the present system of creating model classes for experience in multiclass levels could be adapted to also provide for experience in planning and using local curriculum from a wide variety of bases as for example, a marine environment, an agricultural environment, or alpine sports environment, both winter and summer. Staff with experience in local curriculum understand how important it can be for the school, within a specialised environment. Fonterra, a multinational company with dairying commitments and rural connections in New Zealand, have already employed educationalists to develop resources based around their products, perhaps a harbinger of things to come in rural education.

It can be seen that many of the recommendations revolve around the criticality of developing and establishing a local curriculum, and in the personality characteristics that permit the ready establishment of close relationships with people in the local community. Additionally, it is recommended that rural school BOTs provide for succession of the principal through funding extra time for the new appointee to be able to work with the

outgoing principal. Sustainability of the school may depend on a clear path of succession being established to induct the new principal successfully.

There are implications for future research in these recommendations as well, which will be presented in the next section.

5.8 Recommendations For Future Research

This research project points to a need for further research to replicate the results presented here and to extend the research not only to other rural areas throughout New Zealand, but also to determine if similar results are obtained for principals in small schools in suburban and urban settings. This latter suggestion will provide empirical evidence as to whether the differentiated leadership practices between small and large schools in suburban and urban contexts, and whether the criticality of a local curriculum, is as important for small suburban and urban schools as it is for small rural schools. Further research in these areas will be able to determine whether or not it is context, based on location, rather than size, as a context that creates the differences. In addition, the question of local curriculum needs to be addressed, given the criticality found in this research for small schools perceived effectiveness and community support. How much of the curriculum needs to be local content and whether this can be achieved through other means, such as using community people within the school, are all questions needing clarification. In addition, research will need to inform how effective the local curriculum is after it has been in place over a number of years or if the circumstances of the community change, as for example the underlying economy changes from agriculture to tourism or even mining. A watching brief will need to be kept on the achievement of

students who have had their primary education in small rural schools with local curriculum as to whether this needs to be broadened before entrance to higher education. If some of these recommendations are in place future research will determine how effective the suggestions are in practice.

Future research also will need to address the area of failing schools in rural areas. Most educational research has been carried out in successful schools. Is there a common set of characteristics for less effective schools, such as that of local curriculum in the small rural schools as found in this study? Future research has a role in determining what precisely are the effects of closing schools for rural communities. Research (Lyson, 2002, 2005; Wright, 2007) has pointed to severe deprivation and social erosion for rural communities if this occurs. There is a reliance on the part of the New Zealand economy on rural goods, and the new resurgence of populations in rural areas in other countries. Without the vital cog of rural schools, will these communities survive and develop or will they stagnate and eventually die?

5.9 Conclusions

Viability of rural schools means that those in positions of responsibility need to be aware of the vital role of rural schools in communities, not just in economic terms but in terms of social capital, social cohesion, and development. If this is accomplished, it may affect the outcome of future rounds of amalgamation of rural schools. Rural schools are not a place for the inexperienced; they need the best quality principals and teachers, and sufficient support from a variety of agencies, including government.

Given the three factors of effective leadership, local curriculum, and community support, small schools can be effective, excellent, and exciting, and provide a blueprint for the future, as Chalker (1999) proposed for the USA. The presence of all three factors can be a very powerful mix, as shown by the case of Patearoa School in Central Otago. With just 17 students in 2000, Patearoa School won the category for best little school in New Zealand and then went on to win the final accolade in the national competition for “School of the Year” for the whole of New Zealand. How was this achieved? It was a result of an experienced and effective principal, who implemented a local curriculum, that motivated the students to achieve, and that engaged the community into committed support for the school. So committed, in fact, that with 17 families of the 17 students, over \$22,000 was raised in outside funds in one year to support the school’s programmes. Unfortunately, with a new principal, inexperienced in rural areas, the school took less of a role in community affairs, and with less prominence locally and concomitantly less support, slowly the school role dwindled away and ultimately, the school closed.

Successful small rural school leadership in this research was found to be qualitatively different from leadership in large rural schools and possibly in small urban schools. Pedagogic leadership was crucial but size, context, and contiguity were all important mediators of effectiveness and professional leadership practices in these schools. Small schools have a vital role in re-energising small communities through the development of social capital and in sustainability through developing a local curriculum (see Wright, 2003; 2007). Time is needed, the interviewed principals all agreed, and may be a forgotten factor for establishing relationships for becoming an effective principal for a particular school, and for creating and sustaining an effective and sympathetic

curriculum. New forms of technology, which were not a part of this thesis, may have an affect not yet imagined.

Small rural schools have many qualities worth emulating, particularly in terms of open, collegial, community-minded leadership (Chalker, 1999). “It is curious,” noted Herzog and Pittman (1995), “that rural communities, which for so long have been marginalized by the dominant culture, have precisely the qualities for which critics of American schools are now looking” (p. 118). The same could be said of rural schools, which are such an essential element of rural communities but which through an ongoing process of amalgamation and closure are disappearing and may be lost forever, thus depriving their communities of a vital, essential component for their survival.

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Glossary

A & P Show: Agriculture and Pastoral Show. An annual show showcasing agricultural practices, animals and machinery held in nearly every rural district in New Zealand. An important event locally contested fiercely, to present produce and animals to be judged in competitions. Prizes are usually cups donated by the local area and lead to recognition nationally thus translating into better prices for produce and animals. Alongside the schools' pet days, they provide an avenue for children to display their skill in raising pets such as lambs and calves. These classes are strongly supported and fiercely contested and can be fraught with danger for the unfamiliar.

The RD: RURAL DELIVERY. Used in both addresses and delivery, the RD provides rural areas and schools with a regular mail and supply delivery service. Rural schools find them essential for sending out newsletters or flyers to district members who do not have children at the school.

AO: Achievement objective. (Ministry of Education, 2007). Each of the essential learning areas in the New Zealand curriculum is divided into different levels with each level equating to number of years at school. For each level there is an AO which is the equivalent of a major concept or big idea which the student is expected to understand or achieve. For some learning areas there are several AOs for each level and for each strand at each level.

BOTs: Board of Trustees A usually parent elected board of governors who are responsible for the running of the school. BOT's have to carry out duties specified under the NAGs and NEGS.

Decile level. A complex system of measuring the socio-economic levels of each school. Lower deciles that is level 1 decile or level 2 equate to high povert/high needs schools in the USA and to schools in the UK which have a high number of children who

are eligible for free or subsidised school lunches. They are generally found in the poorer suburbs of large cities or very remote, poor rural areas. They are important for schools because lower decile schools, that is schools with a decile rating of up to level 4, receive extra funding per pupil, subsidies for staffing and professional development for staff, paid shifts to and from the schools for staff, and more money for principals. In addition they can apply for grants for new programmes to promote learning, and in some cases have more staff per pupil than the ordinary schools' staffing ratio (Ministry of Education, nd.).

ERO: Educational Review Office. (Education Review Office, nd.). A government agency which equates to OFSTED in the UK which visits all schools on a tri-annual basis. The timing varies according to the report given to the school. ERO prepares a report for the MOE and for the local community on how well they see the school operating in curriculum, in pupil achievement, and in compliance to nationally set legislation governing school times, length of day and school terms and other legal requirements. Where a school is deemed to be operating poorly it is given a discretionary report with a number of requirements to be met before the next visit. The discretionary visit is usually timed to occur within a year to eighteen months. A good report on the other hand may mean that the next visit will be five years alter instead of the normal three year visit. If a school is still not meeting the requirements set down by ERO, the BOT can be dismissed and a transitional Governor can be appointed in their place to ensure that the school meets the requirements set out. This is a very serious occasion and can lead ultimately to school closure if progress is not made. For rural schools, a bad ERO report can result in an area review which means that every school in the wider district is subject to consideration for amalgamation or even closure. It creates a lot of angst for both principals and staff of all the area's schools.

CRT: Classroom release time. All teachers are given a period of classroom release time as of right. This may vary from one period to several days for senior

members of staff and is usually granted to carry out class programme planning or in the case of senior members to carry out duties related to observing or assisting new teachers, or in relation to obtaining assessment data for programmes to improve achievements.

DP/AP: Deputy principal Assistant Principal. A deputy principal position becomes available at U3 level of school and an Assistant principal at U4 and above. There may be more than one AP at larger schools. The DP and AP normally have responsibility for a level of the school, for example, the junior school which is Year 1 – Year 4, or the senior school Year 5 – Year 8. They also stand in for the principal when the principal is off site.

ELAs: The essential learning areas. (Ministry of Education, 2007). The new Zealand Curriculum specifies seven essential learning areas which describe in broad terms the knowledge and understanding which all students need to acquire. The seven areas are : Mathematics, language and languages, science, social sciences, the arts and health and physical well-being, and technology. In addition the curriculum stipulates 5 competencies (formerly known as essential skills) which schools must also teach within contexts. The five competencies are Thinking, Contributing and participating, Self management, Language, symbols and text, and Relating to others. These are the skills needed for lifelong learning and communication. The competencies and the essential learning areas complement each other with one the ELA providing the contexts for the competencies to be taught.

FTTE: Full time teaching equivalent. A method of working out the amount of time for a teacher to be present or released within the classroom timetable of five hours per day contact time. Normally used to calculate the time a principal can hire an extra teacher to relieve them for admin duties.

MOE: Ministry of Education. (Ministry of Education, 2007). The government

department responsible for education and educational policy, answerable to the Minister of Education and the government of the day. Each region of the country has an MOE office which can provide assistance and advice to schools within its area.

NAGs: National Administration Guidelines. (Ministry of Education, 2007). A set of six guidelines given to each board of trustees to determine how to manage a school. BOTs are responsible for the governance of the school and the principal, who is the CEO of the BOT, has the responsibility to manage the day to day organisation and running of the school. Each NAG relates to a different area of management. There are six NAGs in all. NAG 1 relates to the school and its curriculum management. It stipulates the learning areas that are to be taught in the schools as part of their curriculum. How a school translates the learning areas into everyday school practice is the responsibility of the school and its staff. NAG 2 relates to the hiring, employment and firing of school staff. Normally the BOT as a whole, employ the principal, but the hiring of other staff is generally the principals' prerogative.

NEGs: National Educational Guidelines. A set of 10 guiding principles related to the educational coverage within schools. It requires that a broad and balanced curriculum over the seven essential learning areas be made available and taught in all government funded schools. It also stipulates that the education provided must be equitable for all students and within national priorities.

NZEI: New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa. The New Zealand primary teachers' union responsible for all teachers in primary schools Years 1 – 8 and for kindergarten and early childhood teachers.

The NZC Framework. The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (NZCF). (Ministry of Education, 1993). The new Zealand curriculum framework is the official document which sets out the official policy for teaching, learning, and assessment in New

Zealand Schools. Alongside the national curriculum statements which provide appropriate teaching and learning approaches it recognises the significance of the Treaty of Waitangi and the special place of Māori in New Zealand society.

Principal release teacher. The teacher who takes over the position of replacing the principal in the classroom and is often a part- time position.

Principal release time. Every principal is granted a certain amount of time away from the classroom to carry out administrative duties. This varies from .3FTTE for U1 principal to 1FTTE for a walking head. (0.3 equates to 1 and a half days per week). A week is calculated as 1 so that 1FTTE means a full time teacher for the school week.

PPTA: Post Primary Teachers Association. The secondary teachers' union responsible for all teachers of students in Year 9 to year 13 and at tertiary level.

SLOs: Specific learning outcomes. (Ministry of Education, 2007). For each AO there are several specific ideas which lead to an understanding of the AO. They are often regarded as indicators towards progress of attaining the ao. SLO's are measurable actions which the student can demonstrate as a skill towards demonstrating understanding or achievement of the AO.

THE Southern Sting/Southern Stags (The Sting/the STAGS). A local netball and rugby team respectively which while representing Southland (hence the Southern) – the smallest province with the least number of people in NZ, both went on to win national competitions. They were a uniting force for all Southlanders who displayed enormous pride and fierce ownership of both teams. Both teams garnered huge positive advertising for their home areas resulting in a number of people transferring south to live, and a number of successful commercial sponsors. They provide a wonderful model for rural schools to emulate in gaining support.

STA: School Trustees Association. The elected body responsible for advising, assisting with training and obtaining legal aid for schools' board of trustees.

Teaching principals. Below U4, all principals have a responsibility for teaching daily. The amount of time differs widely from 1 day to full time for U1 and some U2 principals. Principals of U4 and U4+ schools often teach individual students or teach a class for a period of the day to relieve the class teacher for other duties or as part of the classroom release programme.

U Grades of schools. All schools are given a U grading according to roll size. This determines not just the principals' salaries but also the number of teachers allowed to be hired. (Ministry of Education, 2012).

The table sets out the rate of the school roll based salary component by school U-grade.

U-Grade	Roll size	Current salary
1	1-50	\$76,288
2	51-100	\$82,260
3	101-150	\$89,090
4	151-300	\$96,071
5	301-500	\$103,052
6	501-675	\$107,042
7	676-850	\$111,196
8	851-1025	\$115,353
9	1026-1200	\$118,178

10	1201-1400	\$121,003
11	1401-1600	\$125,125
12	1601-1800	\$129,248
13	1801-2000	\$133,103
14	2001-2200	\$136,959
15	2201-2400	\$140,334
16	2401+	\$143,708

Types of schools in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Area schools. These are usually quite large schools found in rural areas which teach students from NE (New Entrant/Year 1) to the end of schooling Year 13. Most primary schools end at Year 6 (or 8) and the students progress to Intermediate school for Year 7 and Year 8 or to High schools from Year 9.

ECE: Early childhood education. Early childhood education is highly valued in the NZ system. It can be of various types.

Kindergartens are the official early education system. Children attend for a morning or afternoon initially, translating to a full day after 4 years of age. Staff have attended a recognised training provider and adhere to the Te Whariki, the New Zealand preschool curriculum document.

Pre-schools and playcentres are normally volunteer-run centres catering for pre-school children in variety of programmes. Parents in the play centre system usually have to opt into some personal training and take turns at providing assistance on a rostered basis. Pre-schools are often a paid early childhood centre which provides trained staff at a

cost to the parent. Staff have usually graduated from a recognised provider but do not follow a proscribed curriculum.

Contributing school. These are primary schools who retain pupils to Year 6 only. The students then progress to Area schools or to intermediate school where available.

Full primary. These primary schools retain pupils at Year 7 and 8. They are often found in rural areas.

Intermediate schools. Normally found only in urban areas, these schools cater for Year 7 and Year 8 only. Students progress from here to high schools.

High schools (secondary schools). Usually found in cities, these schools cater for students from Year 9 – Year 13. They can be co-educational or single sex schools.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questions.

RURAL PRINCIPAL SURVEY							
<p>INSTRUCTIONS: Thank you for agreeing to take part in this survey. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about your personal opinions with regard to being a rural principal. There are no right or wrong answers and your responses are anonymous.</p>							
<p>School Leadership Practices - Part I</p> <p>This first set of items concern characteristics of school <i>leadership</i>. Please rate each item on a scale of one (low) to six (high) in terms of its <i>importance to you as a rural school principal</i>.</p>							
Please fill in your selection		1	2	3	4	5	6
0.	Possible answer... (number completely filled in)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.	Staff share a consensus on school goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Staff have shared beliefs about learning and teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Staff share a sense of community and co-operation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Staff engage often in talk about curriculum with each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Staff have high expectations of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Parents have high expectations of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	The community has high expectations of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I involve, and negotiate with, all staff in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	I am directly involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I regularly monitor curriculum goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	I regularly monitor student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	I model new teaching and assessment practices for other staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13.	I don't have a preferred leadership style.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	My leadership style routinely involves others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	I am confident with leading initiatives that have uncertain outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16.	I encourage staff to express their opinions even when they may be contrary to mine.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	I engage with staff in discussion related to current theories and practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18.	Teaching time is expressly protected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	My office follows a truly open door policy; that is, I always make myself available to staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20.	I take into account the personal aspects of staff when making decisions about support and resourcing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21.	I meet with staff socially, outside school hours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
22.	I encourage staff to try new year levels.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23.	All staff are encouraged to exchange teaching roles and/or team teach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
24.	Staff follow clearly established routines for dealing with difficult situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25.	The BOT expects the principal to take the initiative in most aspects of decision making in this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



School Leadership Practices – Part II

The items from School Leadership Practices – Part I are repeated in this next section. This time, please rate each item on a scale of **one (low)** to **six (high)** occurrence in terms of *actual practice in your school*.

Please fill in your selection	1	2	3	4	5	6
26. Staff share a consensus on school goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
27. Staff have shared beliefs about learning and teaching.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
28. Staff share a sense of community and co-operation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
29. Staff engage often in talk about curriculum with each other .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
30. Staff have high expectations of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
31. Parents have high expectations of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
32. The community has high expectations of students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. I involve, and negotiate with, all staff in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
34. I am directly involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. I regularly monitor curriculum goals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
36. I regularly monitor student achievement.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. I model new teaching and assessment practices for other staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. I don't have a preferred leadership style.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. My leadership style routinely involves others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
40. I am confident with leading initiatives that have uncertain outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. I encourage staff to express their opinions even when they may be contrary to mine.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. I engage with staff in discussion related to current theories and practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43. Teaching time is expressly protected.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. My office follows a truly open door policy; that is, I always make myself available to staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. I take into account the personal aspects of staff when making decisions about support and resourcing.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
46. I meet with staff socially, outside school hours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
47. I encourage staff to try new year levels.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
48. All staff are encouraged to exchange teaching roles and/or team teach.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49. Staff follow clearly established routines for dealing with difficult situations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
50. The BOT expects the principal to take the initiative in most aspects of decision making in this school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Communication.

The following three items address communication in rural schools, with communication meaning more than just a greeting.

Please rate the items in terms of frequency of occurrence where:

	1 = never	2 = once a year	3 = once a term	4 = once a month	5 = once a week	6 = most days.
Please fill in your selection	1	2	3	4	5	6
51. Meet with or communicate with parents.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
52. Meet with or communicate with the wider community on school activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
53. Involve parents regularly in instructional support in the classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Rural School Context.

This next set of items represent concepts about rural schools and their context.

Please rate each item on a scale of 1 (**strongly disagree**) to 6 (**strongly agree**) in terms of *how important it is for a rural school*.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Please fill in your selection						
54. Rural schools offer a family community that urban school find hard to equal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
55. Rural schools and their communities share common values.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
56. Rural schools are an integral part of their community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
57. Rural schools establish strong communication links with their school families and wider community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
58. Rural communities expect staff to be involved in their communities outside of school hours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
59. Rural schools provide for more than just an academic education for their students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
60. Rural schools are pleasant places to work in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Rural School Curriculum.

This final set of items represent concepts about rural schools and their curriculum context.

Please rate each item on a scale of 1 (**strong disagreement**) to 6 (**strong agreement**) in terms of *how important it is for rural schools' curriculum*.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Please fill in your selection						
61. Rural school curriculum should be based on and take cognisance of rural values, its own community and culture.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
62. Community contributions affect decisions about curriculum.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
63. A school curriculum based on its community engages the community directly with the school in ways that ensures local community support for the school and its endeavours.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
64. A local curriculum leads to an increasing impact by the school in the community.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
65. A local curriculum engages students in real learning that produces visible results.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
66. A curriculum based on the local community develops student's appreciation and understanding of place.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
67. Teachable moments should take preference over planned timetabling.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Demographics

Finally, please complete the following demographic items.

68. Gender Male Female
69. What is your highest qualification?
 Certificate / Diploma Bachelors Masters Doctorate
 Other (please stipulate) _____
70. What grade is your school? U1 U2 U3 U4 Larger than U4
71. How many years have you been an educator? _____ years.
72. How many years have you been a principal? _____ years.
73. How many years have you been a principal in this school? _____ years.
74. What position did you hold **immediately prior** to this appointment?
Senior teacher Syndicate leader Management unit holder
Assistant Principal Deputy Principal Principal of a larger school
Classroom teacher Principal of a smaller school Principal Release teacher N / A
75. Please indicate your age range. Less than 25 25 – 29 30 – 39 40 – 49 50+
76. What do you think is an optimum number of years to be in one school as a principal? _____ years
77. In what environment were you raised? Mainly urban Mainly rural About half and half
78. How well did you know this district before your appointment as principal?
Knew it well Had some knowledge Didn't know it at all
79. What **most** influenced your decision to be principal of this school? (Select only one)
Opportunity to advance career Availability of the position
 Other (Please describe) _____
80. Please indicate your degree of satisfaction with being a principal
Very satisfied Mostly satisfied Satisfied Partly satisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied
81. If I could, I'd prefer larger school smaller school
different school the same size different location
different position in a school staying in this school as principal
different position outside education
82. How often do you attend events in the local community other than school events?
frequently once or twice a term almost never
83. How often do you visit the homes of students who attend your school
frequently occasionally almost never
84. Do you take part in local groups or society activities? If so please list.

85. Do you live in the local catchment area of the school in which you are principal? Yes No
86. Have you formed personal friendships in the local area as a result of being principal in this school? Yes No

Appendix 2. Semi-Structured Interview questions

Interview Q. 1 Relates to research question 1.

1. What factors have you found are the most critical for success in a rural school context?

Interview question 2 relates to Research question 2.

2. Which professional practices have you found to be particularly effective as a rural principal? What results have you experienced with this practice? What do you feel hasn't worked? Any reason you can put this down to?
- 3.

SECTION 1 AND 2 - Professional Leadership Practices.

The rural principals' survey that you responded to you and may remember was carried out in the first term and this was the initial part of my data collection. There were a number of interesting results eg:

Interview question 3.

4. Survey results indicate that the majority of the principals surveyed stated their perception was that staff tend to have high expectations of students, yet parents have high expectations infrequently. How would you explain this finding?

Interview question 4.

5. Protection of teaching time was agreed to be important by the majority of principals but in actual practice this occurred less than 50% of the time. How would you explain this discrepancy? Any thoughts on how to change it?

Interview Question 5: This relates to the research question 3.

6. What strategies have you found to be successful in developing partnerships with your community? Have you shared these with other principals? What

hasn't worked for you? What are you planning to do that's new/different in the future?

Interview Question 6: This relates to results from SECTION 3 - Communication of the survey.

7. Regular parent involvement in classroom programmes was greater in larger schools than smaller schools. How would you interpret this result? What implications do you see coming from this?

Interview question 7: This relates to results from the survey for SECTION 4 - The rural context.

8. Shared beliefs were more common in the smaller schools however, 20% of principals (all from small schools) disagreed that their schools and communities shared common values. How would you explain this finding? What would you say to that 20% in terms of what they could do to readdress the balance?

Interview question 8. This relates to the research question 4.

9. Identify your most successful strategies in implementing the new curriculum. What would you have done differently, if anything?

How will you work to implement the new standards that are being introduced, both within your school, with your staff, and in terms of reporting to parents?

Interview question 9. This relates to results from SECTION 5 – Rural school curriculum of the survey.

10. Survey results indicated 93% support for a local curriculum. Can you identify the focus of your local curriculum? Are there changes that you'd like to make to your local curriculum?

How do you design and implement you local curriculum?

Interview question 10.

11. Does any other member of staff have a major responsibility for the design and implementation of curriculum? If so what do they do?

If not, would you like assistance with this or does it work well the way it is?
Why/ Why not?

Interview question 11 and 12 are related to results from the survey SECTION 6 – Demographics.

12. A comparison of gender with highest level of qualification attained showed that 10% of females only, attained postgraduate qualifications. What is the significance of this finding?

Should females be encouraged to attain higher qualifications? Why/why not?
What would be the implications of that?

12. Over forty percent of principals surveyed would like to be in a different position.

Why do you think this is? What sort of different position do you think they want?

Interview question 13: This related to results from the factorial analysis.

13. Principals rated professional practices related to **developing staff** as a priority, whereas in schools stakeholders' **expectations of students and of principals** rated higher. How would you explain this finding?

General Questions

14. How does your daily work – i.e. what you really do each day – compare with your expectations of being a principal?

15. What do you think are the most important qualities for a principal in a rural environment?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Coded interview transcription

INTERVIEW WITH X

Theme

I: Well okay we'll make a start. What factors have you found to be the most critical for success?

X: Engaging positively with the community, that is probably the most critical and with that I've got that it is also critical to have a good relationship with your Board, positive relationship with your Board, a successful relationship with your Board,(Theme 1) making sure that somehow you can get involved in professional support network as a rural principal is important whether that be a cluster that's around you or an artificially little made up group – you know like the ones they have in town

Local networks

I: Yeah 'cos I belonged to one of those and they were good because they weren't actually from you own cluster and that was very relieving sometimes.

X: Yeah well I've put my name down for the first time principals

I: Oh good on you because they will actually set you up with a mentor.

X: Yeah that's right a mentor. But I've found I've been working with Rick – I have rung him several times and Murray I've rung him a few times too and I wouldn't hesitate to talk to any of them about things. I think that's really important and I've also thought that strong relationships and good communication with the teachers and strong relationships with the children, and the knowledge of the community.

Research question 1 and themeclose connections

I: Yeah that is important isn't it so that you don't leap into something that they have tried and decided is not for them and you come in and try it again.

X: Well yeah. Making sure that what you are on about is appropriate.

I: Yeah exactly. Okay those about factors so coming from a professional practices point of view what have you found to be particularly effective?

X: It's important that you are all on the one page so the teachers and the children and the Board and the community all know where you are going to next.

I: Yes shared knowledge well not just knowledge but values, expectations...

X: Yeah expectations – the whole deal. It sounds like the ideal doesn't it?

I: Yeah but that's what you are working towards isn't it?

X: Yeah but I think that would be critical for success (laughs) if I had it!

I: Mm (agreeing) There's degrees of success too though aren't there and I think that takes time.

X: Yeah so question 2 the things I have found most successful I guess about the building of relationships, getting out there at 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock, talking to people and just picking up the telephone for good and bad, having just little things where the parents and the community are invited to come into the classroom. I think that's been the most effective thing in terms of building relationships is just that face to face thing – I write a whole lot of crap in the newsletter but really at the end of the day half of them don't read it and the rest think it's a load of bollocks anyway.

I: Yeah so a whole open door policy that works in practice.

X: And I think the other thing that has really worked for me this year has been really focused and regular dialogue with the staff about where we are going in curriculum areas as a whole – its just all that collegiality thing I think so that you are all standing together and so that there is a cohesiveness I guess.

I: And what you are doing with Helen next week you know sharing the PD workshop with her.

X: Yeah yeah yeah I think it's important to developing all that collegiality.

I: Yes it's taking an active part in their professional development to isn't it?

X: Yeah I think that's important too. So that's all I've got about that.

I: So is there anything that hasn't worked?

X: Umm. I don't know. I haven't really tried a whole lot of stuff. We seem to get quite good community feedback and involvement with what we do.

I: Okay, good. Looking at leadership practices now in the survey that was carried out in the first term you might remember it you may not.

Theme

Theme 1 and success factors

Local networks and research question 1

X: Oh yes I do.

I: There were a number of interesting results for example the data showed that principals felt that their perception of staff was that they had high expectations of children yet this wasn't shared by parents always or at least not as frequently.

X: Well I've just put... I disagree actually. I don't think that's true here.

I: Okay well I've had a 50/50 on this one some of the principals interviewed have said yes that's true for them and some have like you disagreed. So if you had a school that did have this difference what do you think would explain that um... difference between parents and staff.

X: Well possibly socio-economic – they mightn't not actually know what the expectations are that are appropriate, the communication between the principal and the community.

I: In some instances where there has been traditional practices like farm ownership, farm inheritance going down in the family some principals have felt that parents, that there hasn't always been that perceived need for education, but then as farming practices have become more scientific that too is changing and parents are concerned about their children's academic progress.

X: Oh yeah right. It's interesting isn't it. When I think about our current batch of parents there's not many that I wouldn't think would have, necessarily have a very good knowledge of what doing well is – some of them would, some of them wouldn't. But it think that they would all be expecting that they would be successful learners.

I: Good. And the next one was about protecting teaching time.

X: Oh yeah I wasn't quite sure what that meant. What does that mean?

I: It means that too many outside activities or distractions don't impinge on the teaching time of the classroom and I don't mean the teachable moment that occurs in every classroom and so the majority of principals felt it was important to protect the teaching time but in actual practice it occurred less than 50% of the time and so...

X: Well I just think it's pressure you know we all...um

I: Well sometimes if we are thinking of the teaching moment it might be a good thing but then that's still teaching time in that case. In larger schools it tend to be protected because they have

bells and a timetable that less flexible and so it becomes easier to protect.

X: Yeah that's right but what eats into my teaching time often is the unforeseen things that I've got to deal with really – admin things...

I: and like children being hurt ...

X: Yeah or a school break in. I mean that's a very good example that took me a whole morning to deal with that and what did the kids do well – they played for a very long time. How to change it well I think possibly have more teachers in schools – not have sole charge schools – have two teachers in schools etc etc etc,

I: Yes well I agree and of course if there hadn't been a change in government that would have become a reality at the end of this year. We are the only country in the world that has a sole charge system as such that doesn't have another staff member on site.

X: Yeah well I actually think it's dangerous you know to have only one adult if there is a situation like if a kid wanders off or injures itself or...

I: What if you get hurt?

X: That's right. I've been through that with the kids – what to do in that situation if I conk out with a stroke from my HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE because I am PRESSURISED. (laughs)

I: Okay and now you've talked a little bit about developing strategies for developing partnerships. Have you found any particular strategies have been more successful than others for developing partnerships with your community.

X: Well I think the teacher only days funded by the ministry have been good where we have been able to have the community in for two of those and we were able to make one of them two half days which meant we could get a wider spread of people for the morning and then the afternoon. I think community events like the local surfing carnival or even just having a working bee at the school. It's all uniting the school and community to a common purpose - the classroom visits and classroom events, and having classroom helpers.

Closer connections

I: Because you are lucky here you have community help as well not just parents don't you?

X: Yeah we are. Children taking their work home for sharing is always a good thing. We have had some written consultation

which is ..it worked for some people but not for others and here I've got bribery based on the children motivating their parents. I've now sent our charter home for written comment and I'm going to tell the children for every one that comes back with a comment written on it , positive or negative goes in a draw for a chocolate fish for each of their family (laughs) and so I'm expecting to get a lot back.

I: Oh yes. I'm a great believer in food – bribery or whatever. I think what some of the schools have found it's the fathers they've had difficulty engaging because of their work commitment time etc.

X: Working bees though are good for that or having a barbeque thing or something manly like that!.

I: Is there anything that hasn't worked?

X: Well I'm not sure whether the written consultation worked or not. For some it did and for others it didn't. For some it was too much – it went on too long I think but then it's hard and how do you get that information. It was useful I used it you know I used all the information in the charter development.

I: So it's that formal consultation system that doesn't work as well.

X: Yeah well not here, we are fairly informal I guess.

I: Are you planning to do anything different in the future or new for developing relationships, well not relationships I mean for developing partnerships with the community.

X: Ah um, no I'm not.

I: Good. Fair enough. And now the next one which surprised me and may surprise you regular parent help in the classroom programmes was found to be much more extensive in larger schools than the smaller schools.

X: Well I'm wondering if because they have a much larger population of parents to draw from whether you get you know, you have a greater lot of people who are at home with younger children or whatever.

I: I think distance too was a factor in the more isolated rural schools.

X: Yeah it would be and you know here we only got 15 families or something and just about all of them work and so its down to about two or three who come in constantly or regularly to help with classroom programmes and in a bigger school you'd have a lot more I think.

I: Sometimes there is the perception that with smaller numbers you don't need the help so much.

X: Yeah I was just going to say that you know larger schools often mean larger class sizes I know my friend goes into her son's class because she is worried the class is big and perhaps her son wont get enough instruction time. She doesn't work with him her son but she goes in so there will be more time and more adults in the classroom so her son is benefiting. And I think that that's quite valid.

I: Yes it is. Now the next thing rural context and this was interesting as well in the small schools because while shared beliefs were more common in those smaller schools there were 20% of principals and they were all from small schools who said that their school and community did not actually share common values.

X: What would I say to the 20% in terms of readdressing the balance I would say get with the programme and start listening to the community (laughs). I laughed when I saw that because I thought well hell who is making these decisions for their community. Why is the schools values different from the community , the school should be reflecting the values of their community. Crikey that's just terrible.

I: Okay the new curriculum what has been your most successful strategy in developing and implementing it?

X: Well one of the most powerful things has been for me – working with the children – on our mission statement and what that means to them and then going from that to our vision what they really need to be learning. The children really wrote that and I thought that was just amazing.

I: And then you know it's going to be relevant don't you.

X: And they were so on the ball with it. There wasn't anything that they came out with that I thought aw well you know.

I: That's a way out there

X: No and you know they were just spot on.

Curriculum
implementation

Curriculum
implementation
Curriculum design
and imlementation

I: Great.

X: I've got it up on the wall so that has been really powerful for me and it's been really powerful for the board as well. I've photographed the display and taken it to the board because they don't really come into the classroom to look at things like that, really look I mean and they were quite amazed that children would be able to come up with those things and I think it really helped them actually verbalise what was important for their vision of what was important for the pupils here. It was really, really amazing. So now I'm going to go on with our values which the parents have given all the input. With the values that has all come from the parents and now we are taking a value at a time and unpacking it and exploring it and working out what it really means.

I: You are doing that with the children as well.

X: I'm doing that just with the children actually.

I: So they'll know what it looks like, feels like and all those things.

X: Yeah and really that's that whole thing to be modelled and explored and encouraged she says quoting verbatim from the document – A plus for N.....P.....

I: Is there anything you would like to have done differently?

X: I don't know you know it has been very difficult for the board to ... I've been going back at every meeting talking about our charter reviewing our charter, looking at our mission statement, our vision, our goals and I've been getting a lot of blank looks I have to say. But at the last board meeting it was like the penny dropped and all of a sudden they came out with all this really good stuff.

I: And was this after you had shown them the kids work.

X: Well a couple of months after.

I: Oh well that's interesting.

X: Yeah so after months of me saying what about this what about this, at the last board meeting they said well what about this and I thought Oh MY GOD.

I: Great.

X: Yeah it was great. And I think that was purely because they've been on the board for three years now and they've finally come to grips with what this thing is.

Referring to national standards and their implementation

Local curriculum

I: So you will be hoping they stay on and not go off the board.

X: Oh I desperately am hoping.

I: Well they might if they feel they are understanding what it is all about.

X: And I just feel that we are just starting to gel actually as a group so I'd be really sad to see them go. But I don't know what I'd have done differently. I've tried all sorts of stuff with them – the board particularly. How will I get them to stay on...oh

I: The new standards? How will you implement those?

X: I don't know because I haven't seen them yet. I've put whole school pd to come to grips with what they are and what they mean and what will have to happen for our children to meet them.

I: You've seen a few of them – you've seen the draft.

X: I've seen the literacy progressions but I haven't actually seen the standards. I think we'll have to have some sort of strategy some mini strategy to implement them and have to work towards that and we'll have to have some sort of parent education as well some sort of afternoon or so

I: A bit like that reading programme

X: Yeah and just to say that this is what it's all about and this is what you will be seeing in your child's report – is vaguely where I am going because I haven't really thought about it because I haven't really seen one.

I: Right – moving along.

X: Whipping along – Question 9.

I: 93% support for a local curriculum. Can you identify a focus for your local curriculum.

X: Well at 9 o'clock last night all I could think of was community, a school community who are involved in its school, its' programme and its' vision. I think that's a really important one and the other important one that I've got here is that the curriculum is based on our local resources, environment and really has the principles of Education for Sustainability embedded into I guess.

I: So one of your focuses for here would revolve around the local runaka and marae.

X: Yes definitely.

I: So any changes you want to make

X: No I think we have been trying to head down this track for a while and I think we should keep on heading down it and um not enhancing it but...

I: Consolidating it.

X: Yeah really consolidating those goals and I think they are really important and working well and I don't see any reason to change them.

I: How do you design and implement your curriculum. I know you do a combined planning day with staff.

X: Yes how do you. Well EfS is at the basis of it. We still coming to grips with it really with EfS at the base of it and our challenge now has been to make sure we are getting the balance right and we are still not there yet. It's still predominantly science and social studies with a bit of health thrown in with hardly any technology which we really need to address. We plan together and try and use our local resources and local people and community links as much as possible.

I: Is there any other member of staff who has a major responsibility for designing and implementing the curriculum.

X: Well not on her own. Helen and I work together to do it – it's a real it's a conversation between the two of us really. We do the long term planning together and then she pulls her topic stuff out of that and does her planning for that.

I: And do you feel that that works well.

X: Yees and no. It's a hard thing when you do the long term planning together like I have a vision in my mind as to where and how it will go and it doesn't always go that way, more often than not it wont go that way.

I: Well you are allowing the children to make decisions about direction though aren't you and so...

X: Yeah and you have to be prepared to sort of make, to allow people to add their own flavour I guess. I don't know really.

Curriculum
implementation

Curriculum design
and planning

referring to
curriculum
implementation

I: Would you like assistance with designing and implementing curriculum?

X: Well, possibly because...

I: What sort of assistance would you envisage?

X: Well it's not what goes on in the classroom that is the issue for me it's taking a step back from that and recognising what is going on in the classroom and then writing a curriculum document that supports that because really curriculum is what happens in the classroom isn't it. It's foolish to say it's all on paper in a folder in the office. Well I mean it is on paper in a folder in the office but what goes on in the classroom is often so different.

I: And is this a lot of the time.

X: Yes most of the time well it is at the moment because the new curriculum document is out and our curriculum hasn't yet been revised to reflect that so possibly I would like some release time (laughs) or someone who can work with me.

I: Someone with skills in curriculum design you mean or something like that.

X: Yeah to say this is what is happening and this is what you are doing and have you thought about doing it this way or something like that?

I: Yes because the new curriculum document does say that each school can have its own unique curriculum doesn't it?

X: Yes as long as it stays within the parameters of the big picture.

I: Right. So the next few questions are about demographics and there were some pretty interesting items here too. When we looked at the survey a comparison of gender showed that it was only females who had gone on to higher qualifications after the degree. No males.

X: What? Oh!

I: So what would you say would be the significance that females only went on to further study.

X: I think men are bloody lazy. That's what I think. I don't know. When I spoke to some of the male principals I don't think they were very surprised at the result and thinking of their own situation.

I: But why do you think they do it?

Referring to questions from the survey

X: I don't know more money perhaps.

I: Well and also in a rural context. I think sometimes it might be trying to level the playing field because if you have male applying for the job and you have female applying for the job traditionally in rural context they choose male.

Overload and stress

X: So men don't have to be bothered going back and doing any post grad qualifications because their degree is between their legs.

Workload and stress

I: (laughs) that's been the perception of some and of course they can play rugby and go to the local to drink beer with the board chair has figured in the past.

So do you think that females should be encouraged to go on and do higher qualifications.

X: Well I read it completely differently I thought you meant that only 10% of females were going on to higher study. Well that's amazing.

Yes I think so yes but I think everyone should be encouraged to acquire higher qualifications because the more professional knowledge you have the better really. Not just females though.(answering question from the survey about female qualifications being higher than males)

I: The next result was a bit worrying because 40% of principals surveyed wanted to be in a different position than where they are now. Why do you think that might be?

X: Well as the holder of unreasonably higher blood pressure I think its all down to stress.

Workload and stress

TAPE TURNED OVER/

X: Well I think principals are over worked and stressed out. They don't get enough support – who supports principals?

I: Particularly rural do you think?

X: Well yes who supports them.

I: What sort of different position do you think they would be wanting?

X: The caretaker's job. Well I have to say I have had two quite stressful terms and I have thought that a nice little scale a job would be just suit me well doing what I love doing and being in the classroom without all the adminy crapola but then I do like also being the author of my own destiny.

I: And a number have looked at being in a larger school.

X: What so they can be a walking principal.

I: Yes I think so but sometimes its more support larger staff more shoulders to lean on.

X: Well you see I would want more time in the classroom and less time in the office. I would like someone to come in here and do all my work in the office i.e. I would like to work for someone (laughs) – no I wouldn't . I don't know I just don't think they get any support they are just tired. You never get a break not only as a principal but as a teacher. You might not be physically at school all the time but you are physically plotting and working out what you are going to do next and mm.

Answering results from survey where principals put development of staff above expectations of student achievement.

I: In the next section we looked at the professional practices and how they sort of clumped together and with principals the priority was the development of staff, whereas with stakeholders, parents and bot etc it was expectations of students and principals that rated higher than developing staff.

X: Well what does that mean?

Workload and stress

I: Well it means that um a principal would say that professional development helping staff would be their priority towards better achievement and ..

X: And so a board or a community would say that children achieving at a higher level would be their priority and principals achieving at a higher level.

I: The question about principals came because so many boards expect their principals to make the majority of decision and to play a role in their boards development and give them guidance. The expectation for the principal in the small schools has been for the principal to guide them and they rely on the principal to make decisions.

Reply to question about expectations of the job

X: Well how can I explain this well...

I: Why do you think parents would put expectations higher than developing staff.

X: Well because isn't that what it 's all about – raising student achievement. So maybe principals see the vehicle for raising student achievement is by developing their staff professionally.

Answering qualities of a rural principal

I: Okay and now we are down to your daily work. What you do each day how does that compare with what you expected to be

doing? Does it live up to your expectations on the job. Has it met your expectations as principal?

X: Yes it has. I always knew it was going to be like this. What I haven't been prepared for was when things go wrong being the feeling of being utterly the can carrying, the one that its all down to. You are on your own utterly on your own.

I: The buck stops here.

X: Yeah and I knew that but I've been shielded from all that with you. It's so completely different having someone to share with. It's been completely different. I mean really there's no difference me being on my own and me being part of a job share still the buck stops at the same place. But just being on my own has made a huge difference to the way I've coped with negative things happening.

I: And its always the negative things that

X: And you just have to find ways of flicking it off. But the actual admin and stuff is exactly the way I thought it would be, more inane tasks than I had expected perhaps. Time wasting tasks.

I: Mmm. Lots of those. So we are down to the most important qualities for a principal in a rural environment.

X: Well low blood pressure, broad shoulders, sensible shoes. I think they have to be multiskilled, to be good budgeters, good with people, good with their staff, they need to be able to listen to their community as well as to be able to do all the teaching. Definitely need a sense of humour I cannot imagine anyone being in this job who was a pencil neck. I just can't imagine it how you possibly deal with it. You have to be able to step outside the little tunnel you might be on and look at the big picture. I think you have to be approachable, constantly available and show that you actually care about your children. Here endeth my lecture.

I: And very good too. Is there any thing else you would like to add.

X: (a very rude and prolonged noise) (laughs)

I: (laughs too) I'm not really sure how I'm going to record that.

X: I don't know either.

I: Well thank you very much.

Commenting about taking part in the survey

X: Well it was good because it really made me think about what I was doing.

I: That's good too.

Other transcripts available from the author.

Appendix 4: Survey results

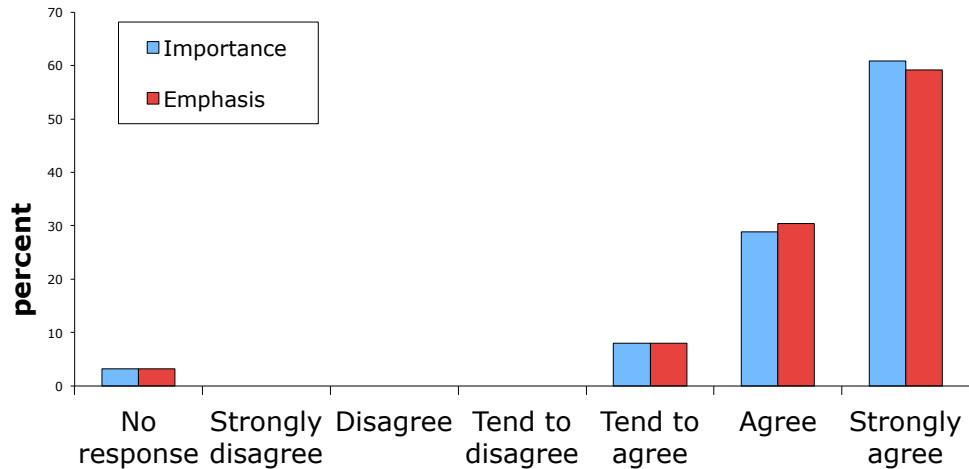


Figure A 1: 2. Staff have shared beliefs about learning and teaching.

It is interesting to note that no principal disagreed that their staff had shared beliefs. There were two non responses from U1 schools who however commented that as they were virtually the only staff they had no other full time staff to share beliefs with other than their part-time principal release teacher. Thirty eight principals (60.8%) strongly agreed and this was mirrored by its occurrence in the actual. A further 18 (28.8%) agreed. This large majority showed almost identical results for both the ideal and the actual more than almost any other leadership practice.

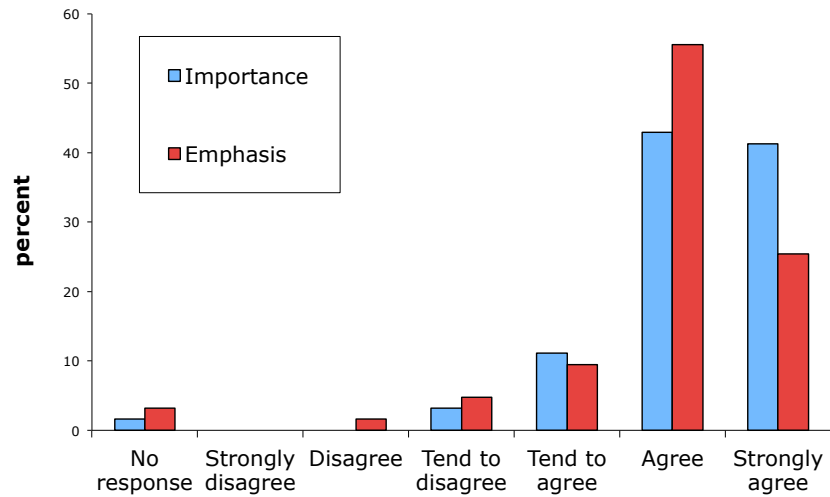


Figure A 2: 8. I involve staff in policy and decision making.

Of interest are the 10 principals (15.9%) who do not involve staff in decisions on a regular basis. These responses tended to come from the very small (U1) schools ie those with either one or two teaching staff.

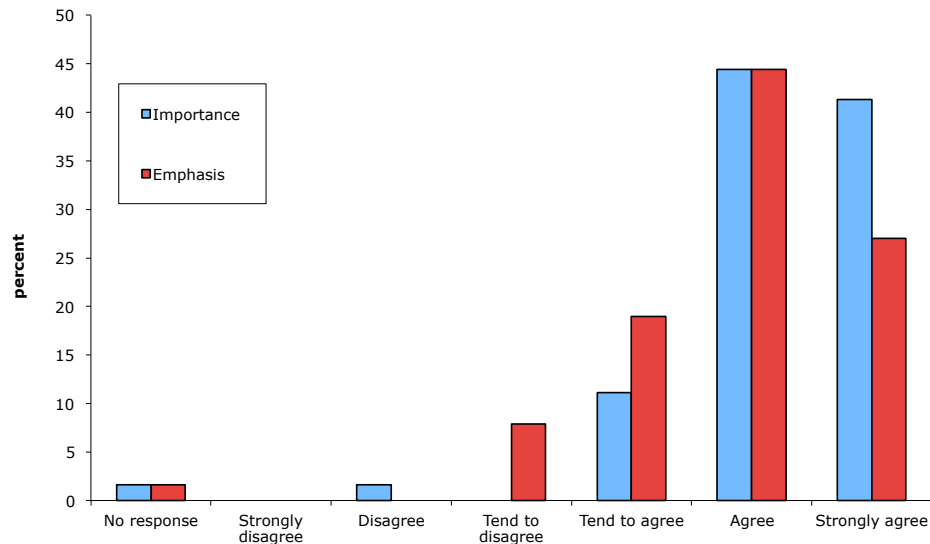


Figure A 3: 3 Staff engage each other in conversations about curriculum.

Only one principal (1.6%) disagreed with this as having importance; 54 principals (85.7%) of the 63 in the sample either agreed or strongly agreed as to its importance and the remaining eight principals (12.7%) tended to agree it was important for staff to engage in more than just talk to each other about curriculum. In actual occurrence in practice, results showed a similar high result of occurring regularly (28: 44.4%) to almost always occurring (17: 27.0%). A further six principals (9.5%) responded to the occurrence as being occasional.

Encouraging staff to express opinions even when contrary to their own formed the basis of Question 16 (Q.41). Results are shown in Figure A4.

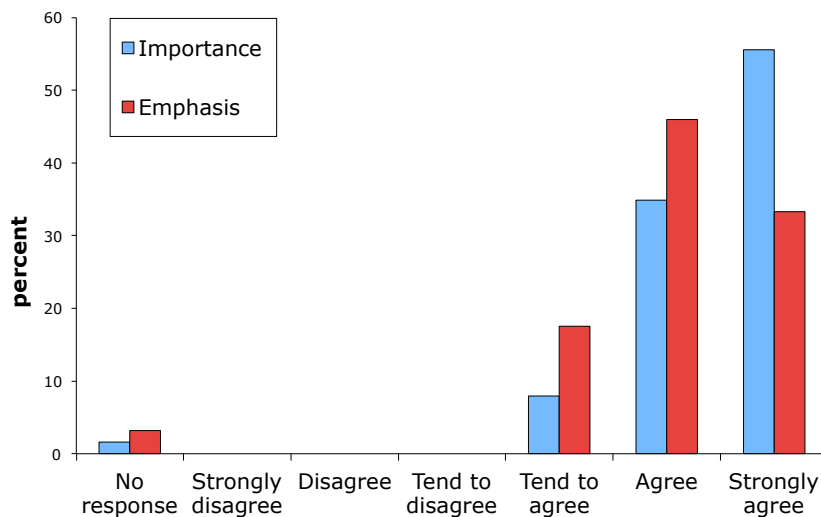


Figure A 4: 16. I encourage staff to express an opinion.

High percentages agreed (34.9%) or strongly agreed (55.6%) that they encouraged staff to express opinions, and this high percentage was repeated with a pattern of regular (46%) and almost always occurrence (33.3%) in practice.

Question 17 (Q. 42) related to engaging staff in discussion about current practices.

Results are shown in Figure A5.

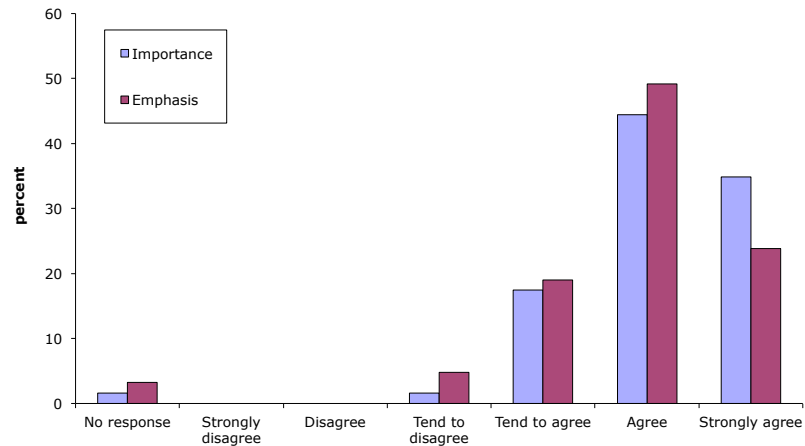


Figure A 5: 17. I discuss current theories and practices with staff.

Over 90% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that this leadership practice was important and over 90% reported it happened in reality either regularly or almost always.

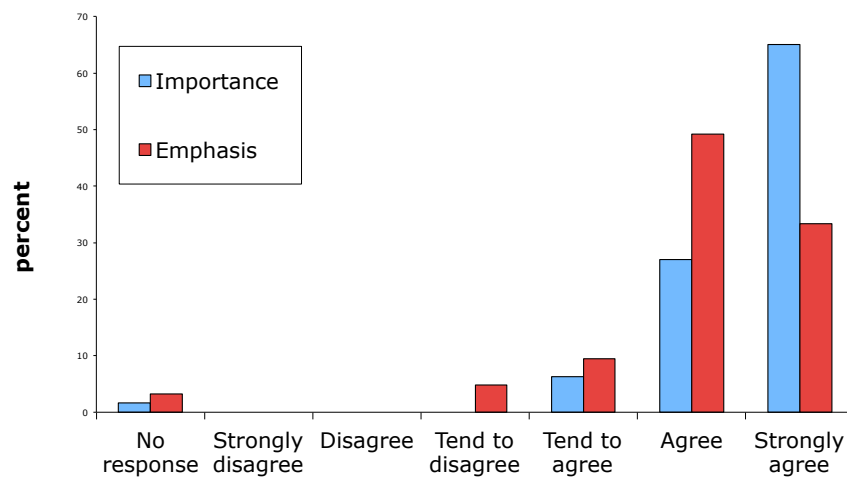


Figure A 6: 2. Staff share a sense of community and co-operation.

Question 1 (Q. 26) explored whether staff shared a consensus on school goals.

The results are shown in Figure A7. There were two missing data points for these questions from two sole-charge schools with only one teaching staff member.

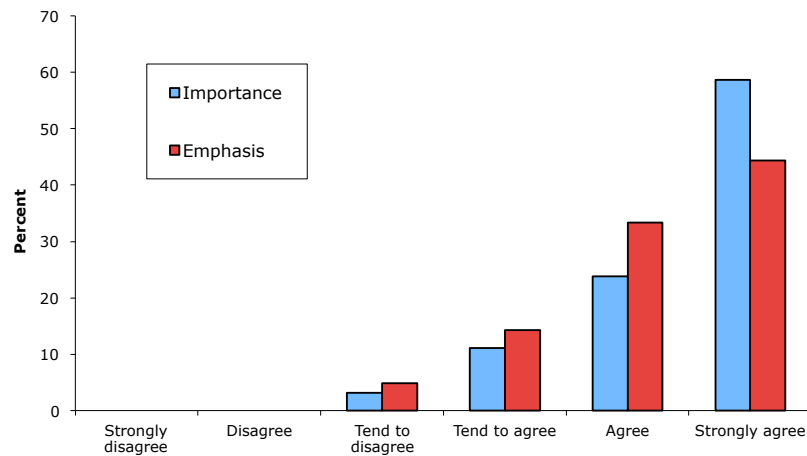


Figure A 7: 1. Staff share a consensus on school goals.

The larger percentage of principals (58.7%) strongly agreed on the importance of a shared consensus, with the actual occurrence at this level of almost always frequency of only 44.4%. This showed in actual practice shared consensus was of less frequency than what principals indicated was of importance.

Item 15 (Q.15) explored whether principals felt confident dealing with new learning initiatives that may have uncertain outcomes. Results are shown in Figure A8.

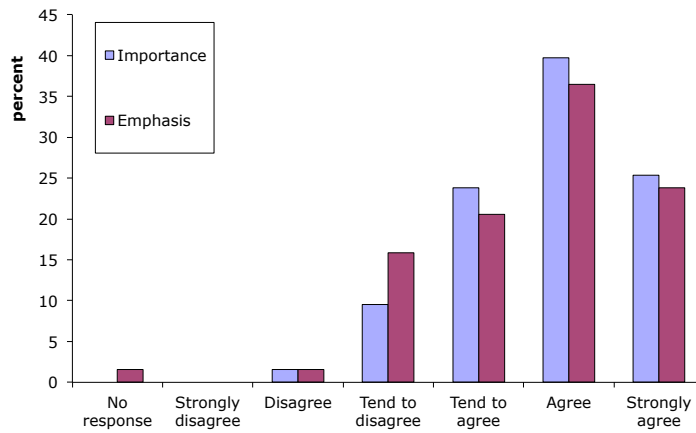


Figure A 8: 15. I am confident with new initiatives with uncertain outcomes.

Eighty eight percent of principals reported that they felt confident overall, with over 25% reporting that they felt very confident. Twenty three point eight percent responded that this was what almost always occurred; 36.5% that it was a regular occurrence; and 20.6% that it was an occasional occurrence. Eleven percent of the principals reported that they felt less confident dealing with new initiatives with uncertain outcomes.

In Question 24 (Q.49), principals were asked whether staff followed clearly established routines for dealing with difficult situations. Results are shown in Figure 9A.

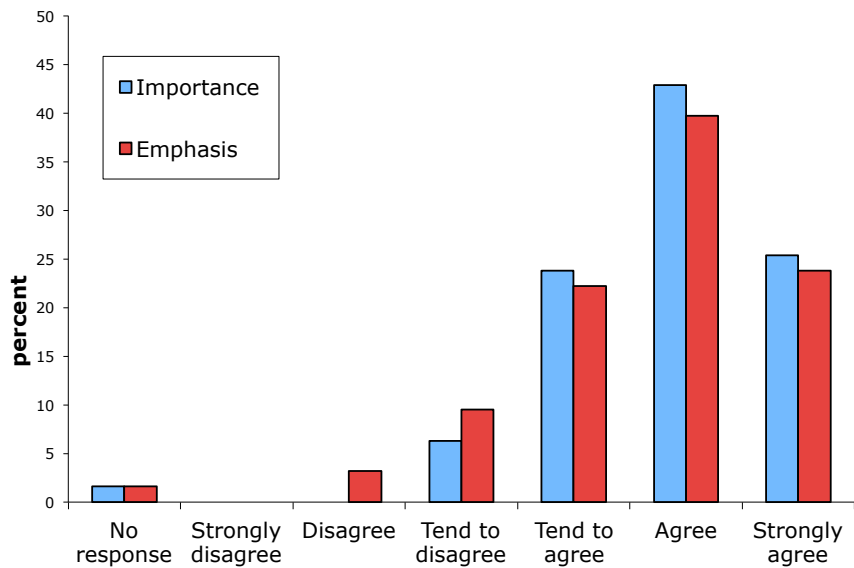


Figure A 9: 24. Staff follow clearly established routines in difficult situations.

Principals' responses indicated that this was both important (over 60%) and that it occurred regularly or more in practice (60%). Over 30% however were ambivalent about the importance of this characteristic, and this was mirrored in the infrequency in practice at the same level.

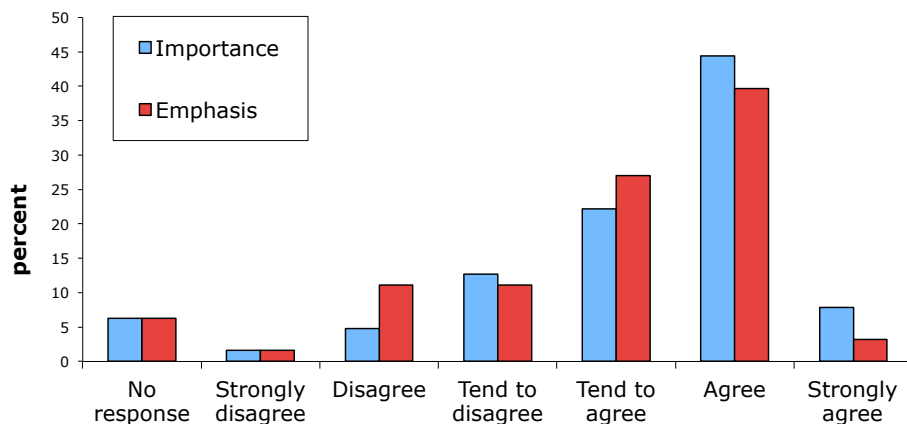


Figure A 10: 12. I model new teaching and assessment practices.

Verbal responses for those who did not indicate a response stated that they either had no teaching responsibilities or were sole-charge. Note the 30% who infrequently, have few occurrences or do not model practices. These include the four qualified responses who did not fill in the item. ***Note also that while regular modelling takes place few principals use modelling as a matter of course.

Taking personal aspects of staff into account formed the basis of Question 20 (Q. 45). Results are shown in Figure A11.

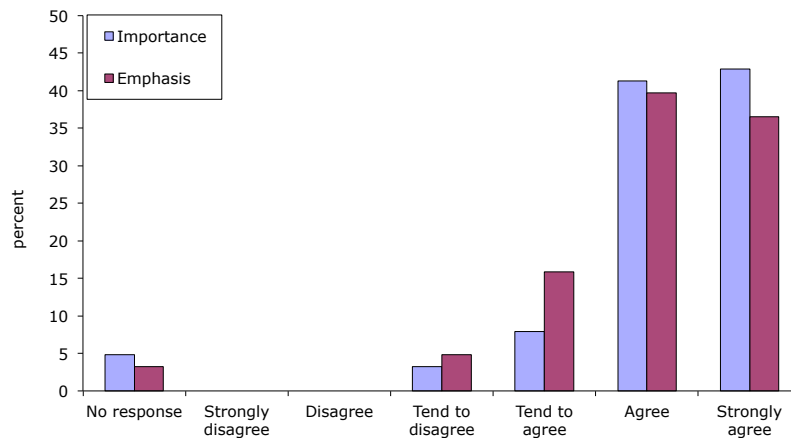


Figure A 11: 20. I take personal aspects of staff into account in decision making.

Ninety two percent of principals answered affirmatively, with over 85% indicating agreement or strong agreement. In practice, over 90% of principals also concurred that this was part of the reality with 76.2% reporting an occurrence of regular to almost always occurring.

Question 18 (Q. 43) explored responses to the protection of teaching time. Results are shown in Figure A12

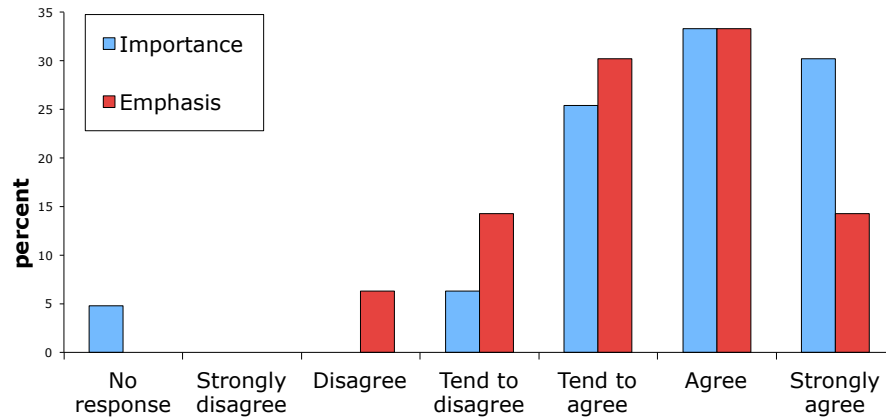


Figure A 12: 18. Teaching time is expressly protected.

Protection of teaching time was generally agreed to be of importance (63.5%), with a further 25.4% tending to agree. In practice, the principals reported that it is less protected than what they indicated as desirable. Results showed over 50% of time where it is only protected occasionally or less.

Figure A13 shows results from questions about principals holding to an open door policy.

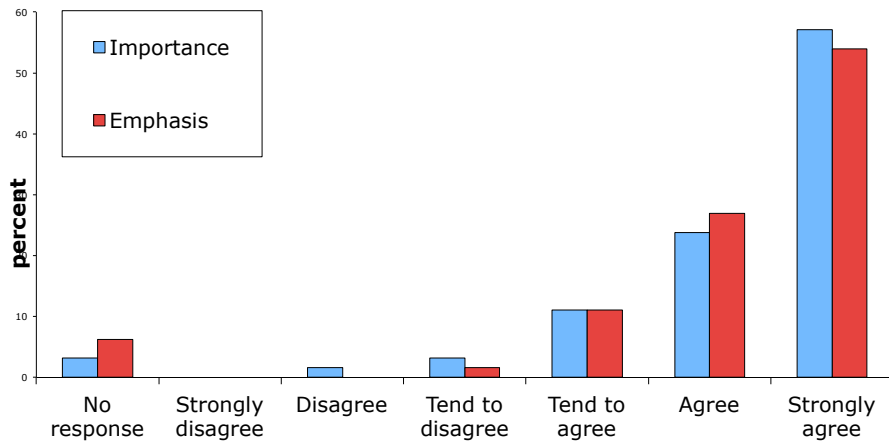


Figure A 13: 19. My office follows a truly open door policy.

Fifty eight of sixty one respondents (92%) agreed to some level of importance for an open door policy in Question 19 (Q.44). In actual practice 58 of the 59 principals who responded to the question, asserted it had occurred or regularly occurred, with 54% of the principals asserting that it had an almost always occurrence.

The last question in this section asked principals about their Board of Trustees expectations of them. Question 25 (Q.50) explored whether BOT expected principals to take the initiative in most aspects of decision making. Results are shown in Figure A14.

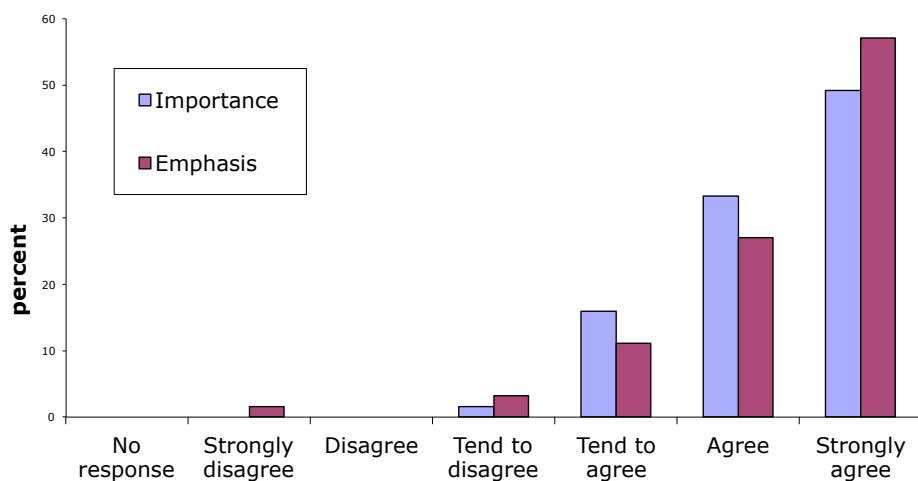


Figure A 14: 25. The BOT expects the principal to take the initiative in decision making.

Half of the principals agreed strongly that their BOT's expected them to take the lead in decision making, with 57.1% reporting an occurrence of almost always happening in practice. In combination with the next level of those principals who agreed with a regular occurrence in actual practice, results showed that this occurred 80% of the time.

Question 21 asked principals whether they met socially with staff outside of school. Results are shown in Figure A15. The two principals who did not fill in a numerical response to this question cited distance as the factor preventing socializing with staff.

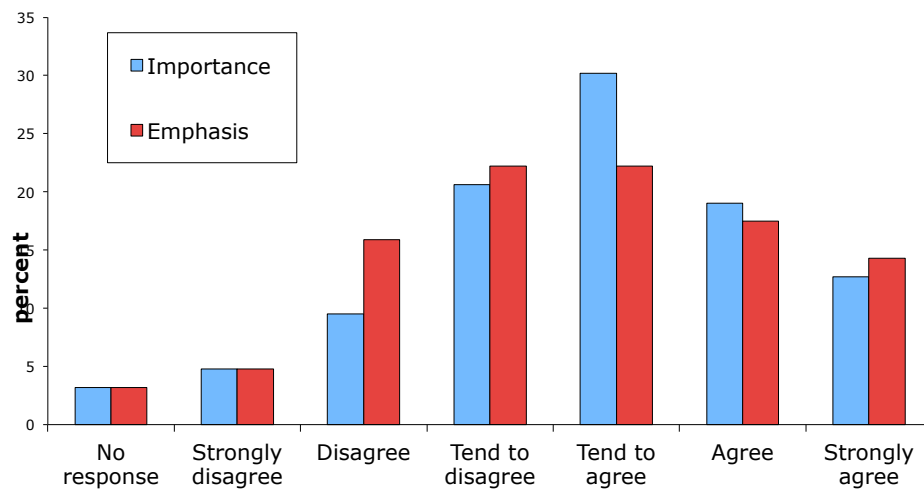


Figure A 15: 20. I meet with staff socially.

Fewer than one third of principals reported that they met staff socially outside of school hours. This held true both for the perceived importance of the item and for its practice in reality.

Question 5 – 7 (Q. 30 – 33) concerned perceptions that staff have of their expectations of students, parents’ expectations, and community’ expectations. Indications of high expectations of students by staff (Q.5) were invariably positive. Results are shown in Figure A16.

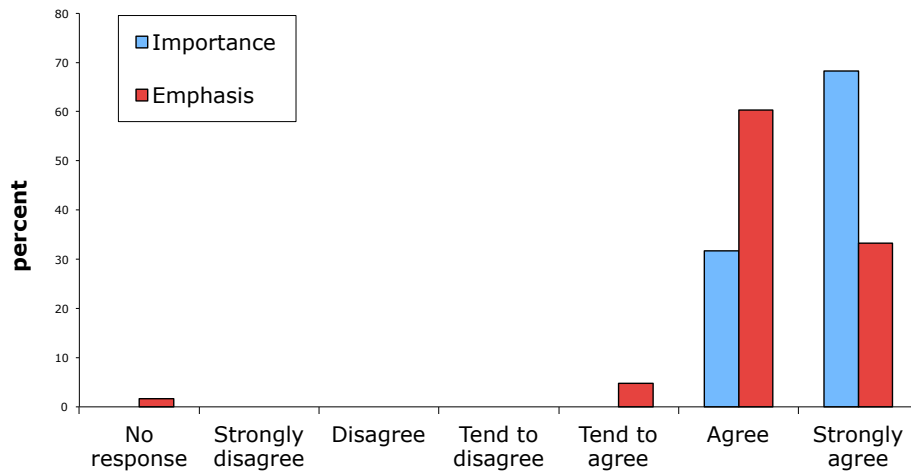


Figure A 16: 1. Staff have high expectations of students.

Question 4 explored the concept of staff engaging in conversations about curriculum with each other. Only one principal (1.6%) disagreed with this as having importance, whereas 54 principals (85.7%) either agreed or strongly agreed as to its importance. In practice results showed a similar high result of occurring regularly (28: 44.4%) to almost always occurring (17: 27.0%) a further 6 principals (9.5%) responded to the occurrence as being occasional

Almost two thirds of respondents strongly agreed that staff should have high expectations of students, but in actual practice this number is halved (33.3%) as to the

characteristics occurring almost always. However, if this number is taken with the number of occurring regularly, results in actual practice approach more closely the level believed important for high expectations of students by staff.

The second question regarding expectations of parents (Q. 6) yielded more varied responses, as shown in Figure A17.

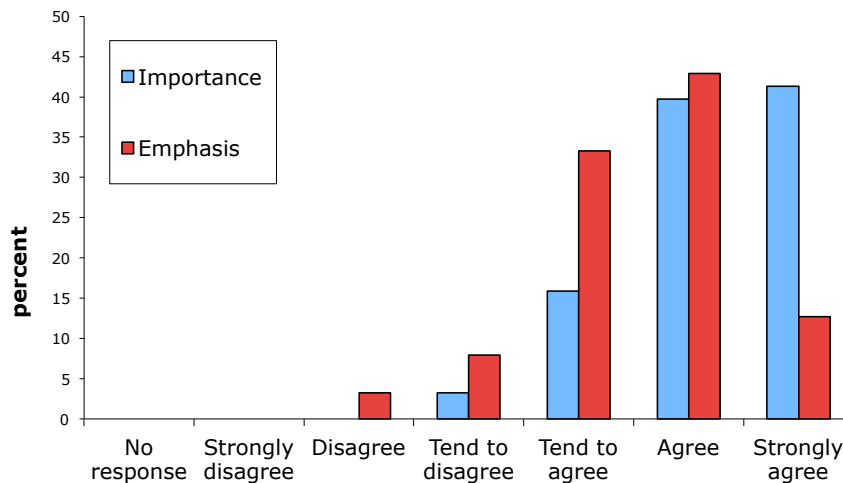


Figure A 17: 6. Parents have high expectations of students.

Over 42% of principals responded that parents only have high expectations infrequently or occasionally, whereas the principals' response to its importance as a characteristic important for rural schools was uniformly high, with 39.7% agreeing and 41.3% strongly agreeing.

Responses to Question 7 (Q.32) about whether the community had high expectations of students showed a more muted response from principals as to importance to them. Results are shown in Figure 1g Responses to Question 7 (Q.32) about whether

the community had high expectations of students showed a more muted response from principals as to importance to them. Results are shown in Figure A18.

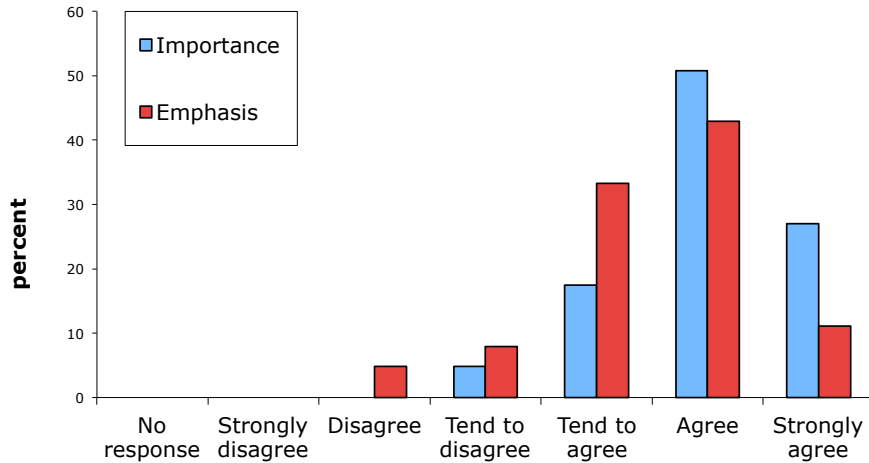


Figure A 18: 7. The Community has high expectations of students.

Eight principals (12.7%) did not specify that this occurred other than infrequently and three principals (4.8%) indicated it was not important to their practice.

Questions 22 – 24 (Q. 47 – 49) concerned characteristics regarding staff management. Question 22 (Q.47) asked whether principals encouraged staff to try new year levels within the school. A number of principals (6: 9.5%) indicated they were sole charge principals (U1) and that this didn't apply. Results are shown in Figure A19.

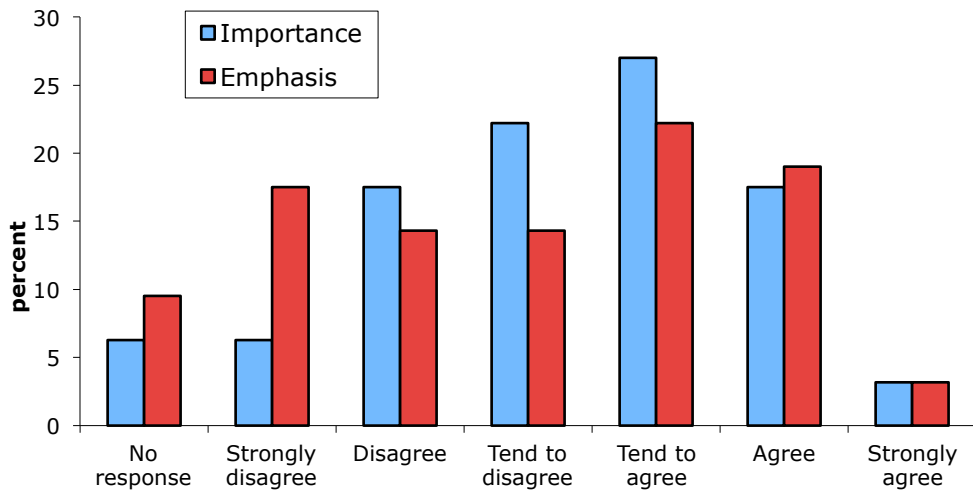


Figure A 19: 22. I encourage staff to try new year levels.

Over 50% indicated that they did not think this was important (52.4%) nor did it happen in practice (55.6%). Just over 20% indicated that they tended to agree and that occasionally this would happen in actual practice. Only two principals (3.2%) indicated that they strongly agreed, and that this happened almost always in practice.

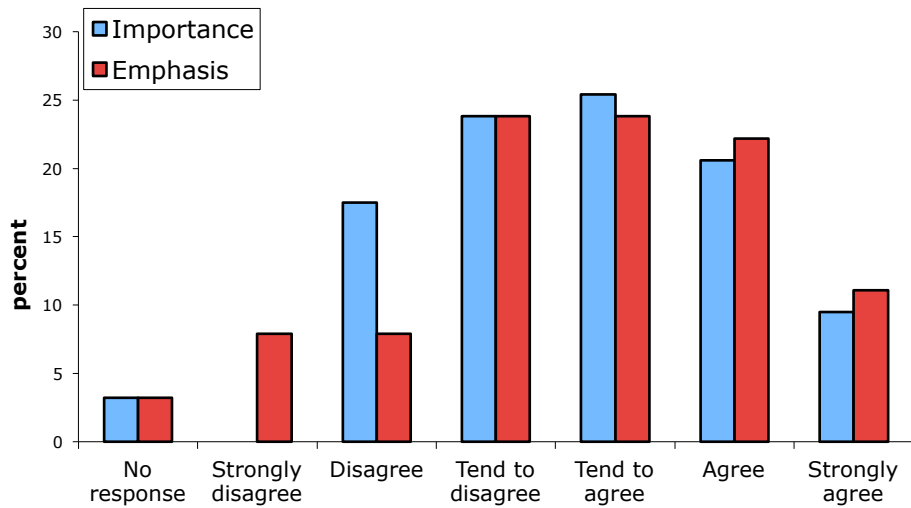


Figure A 20: 23. Staff are encouraged to exchange roles/team teach

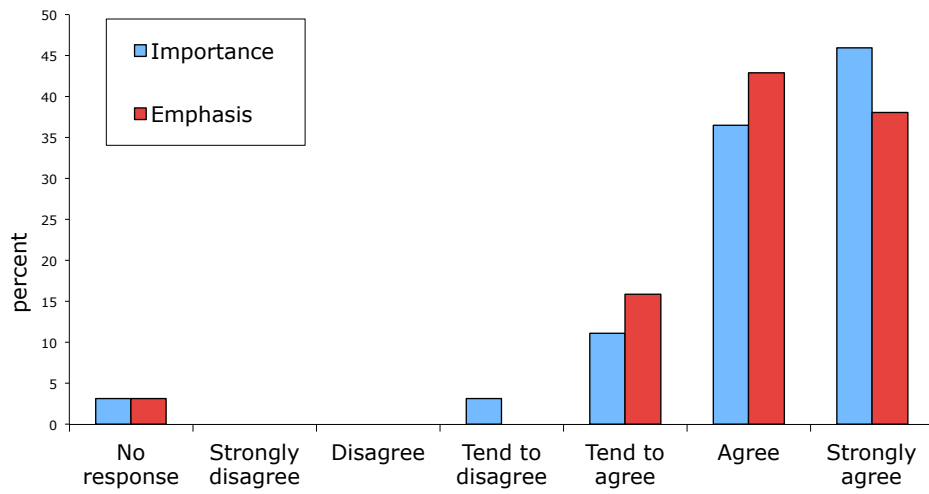


Figure A 21: 13. My leadership routinely involves others

Results showed a predominantly positive response. The principals' agreement of importance matched what they reported as generally happening in reality. There were two missing data points from sole-charge principals.

The next three questions, Question 10 – 12 (Q.35 – 37), involved responses about monitoring and assessment of curriculum goals and student achievement and are related to subscale five. Question 10 (Q.35) asked about regular monitoring of curriculum goals. Results are presented in Figure A22.

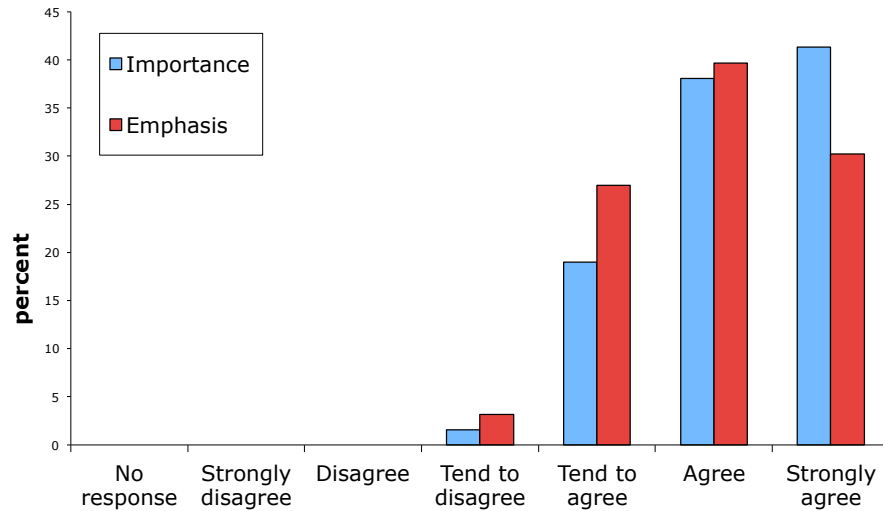
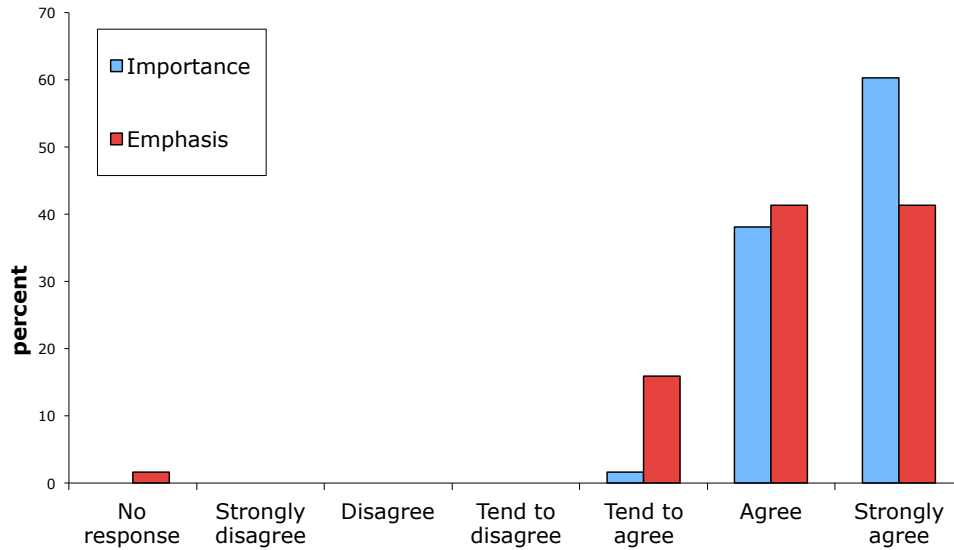


Figure A 22: 11. I regularly monitor curriculum goals.

Nineteen percent of the principals responded that they tended to agree only to regularly monitoring curriculum goals. In actual practice, this translated to over 30% who either monitored curriculum goals infrequently or occasionally.

Question 13 of the survey is related to this subscale. It asked(Q.36) explored whether principals regularly monitored student achievement. Results are shown in Figure

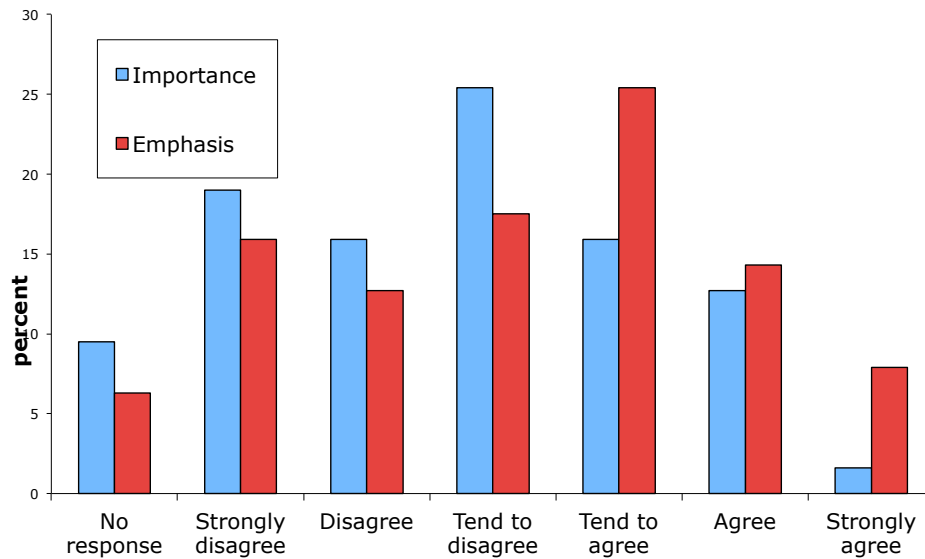


A23.

Figure A 23: 10. I regularly monitor student achievement.

Responses were positive. Almost all of the principals responded with either agreement (38.1%) or strong agreement (60.3%) to this item and a corresponding 82.6% carry out this practice at least regularly. Given that most rural principals are teaching principals for some degree of their time and therefore curriculum or instructional leaders these results are not out of the way.

Question 13 – 22 (Q. 38 – 47) explored aspects of leadership . Written responses showed that principals found Question 13 (Q.38) ambiguous, in that disagreement implied that principals did have a preferred leadership style. Results are shown in Figure



A24. and

Figure A 24: 13. I don't have a preferred leadership style.

Sixty percent of principals disagreed to some extent that they did not have a preferred leadership style. In actual practice principals reported that they occasionally (27%) or regularly (39.7%) used a preferred leadership style.

Question 9 (Q.34) asked whether principals were directly involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum. Results (Figure A25) showed more consistency on this characteristic than any other item, from its perceived importance to actual practice. This is not surprising given that the New Zealand educational system is currently involved in nationwide curriculum reform.

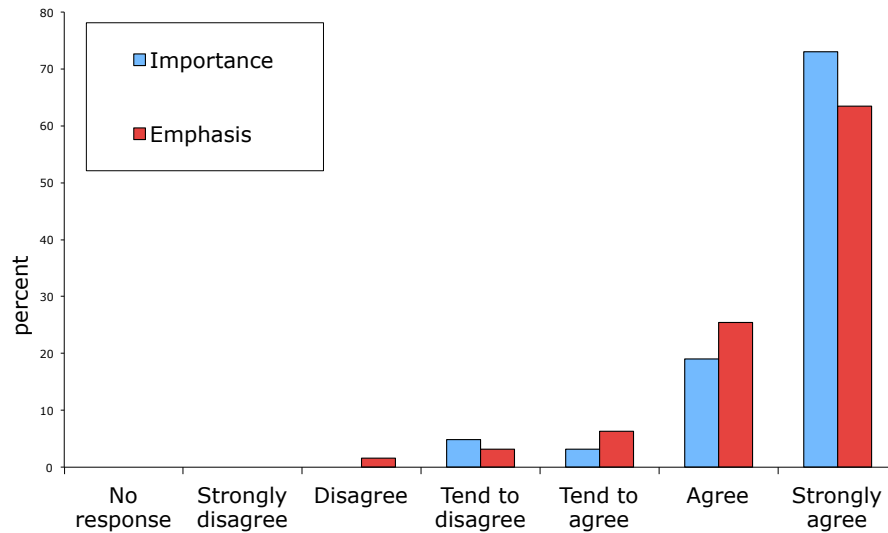


Figure A 25: 9. I am directly involved in design and implementation of curriculum.

Ninety two percent of principals either agreed (19.0%) or strongly agreed (73.0%) that this is an important leadership practice; 25.4% of the principals responded that it regularly occurred and 63.5% responded that it almost always occurred as part of their practice. There were three respondents (4.8%) who were not involved with implementing and designing curriculum, all principals of larger U4 and >U4 schools.