



# **More than an Education**

**Leadership for rural  
school–community partnerships**

**A report for the Rural Industries Research  
and Development Corporation**

by

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# Foreword

Increasingly, schools are the major institutional presence in rural areas, particularly given the continuing departure of banks and other services. Whilst the provision of education in rural areas has direct benefits in terms of educational outcomes, there are other benefits to communities from rural schools which are not well understood.

This project stemmed from research into social capital in rural communities, which found that the quantity and quality of interactions between individual and institutional players influence the social and economic outcomes of those communities. Schools provide one of the major opportunities for interaction in rural communities. The project also stemmed from research into the impact of various leadership styles and leadership characteristics on the relationship between schools and communities. The focus of this project is therefore on the relationship between school and community leadership and building community social capital.

The report presents case studies of rural school–community partnerships in five very different rural communities. Each case study outlines the nature and extent of the partnership, and analyses the influence of leadership and other factors on the development and sustainability of the partnership. Drawing on findings from the case studies, the report then develops a model of the leadership process for developing school–community partnerships, and identifies a number of indicators of effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership.

The report concludes with lessons to assist schools and communities to develop effective partnerships. It also provides a number of recommendations to policymakers. It is intended that these recommendations will guide funding bodies in the provision of education services in rural areas, in the integration of education, health and other services in rural communities, and in the implementation of rural community development programs. Policy recommendations will also inform rural leadership programs and educational leadership courses on strategies and modes of leadership which enhance school and community partnerships for the benefit of rural communities.

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**Peter Core**  
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# Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACSSO	Australian Council of State School Organisations
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
APC	Australian Parents Council
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness program
ASTF	See ECEF
BEC	Business Enterprise Centre
CAP	Country Area Program (Priority Country Area Program in some States)
CRLRA	Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
ECEF	Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (formerly Australian Student Traineeship Foundation)
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICPA	Isolated Children's Parents Association
IT	Information Technology
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
P & C	Parents and Citizens association
P & F	Parents and Friends association
PCAP	See CAP
RIRDC	Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SES	State Emergency Services
SWL	Structured Workplace Learning
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training



# Executive summary

## Objectives

The three project objectives were to: examine the extent and nature of the contribution of rural schools to their communities' development beyond traditional forms of education of young people; investigate the ways in which the modes of leadership of the school and community leaders influence the extent and nature of the school's contribution to the community, and consider the constraints to schools being put to other uses.

## Background

Education in rural communities has been identified as a priority issue by the National Farmers' Federation, as well as by state Departments of Education. Whilst the provision of education in rural areas has direct benefits in terms of educational outcomes, there are a number of economic and social benefits to communities from rural schools, which are not well understood. In fact, schools can be a vital, but often overlooked, component of rural community development. Schools provide one of the major opportunities for community interaction, and this project builds on research into social capital in rural communities, which found that the quantity and quality of interactions between individual and institutional players influences the social and economic outcomes of those communities. It also builds on research into the impact of various leadership styles and leadership characteristics on the relationship between schools and communities. This project stemmed from a need within the Australian rural context to better understand how social capital can be built using the resources and opportunities provided by schools, and the role of leadership in the process.

## Research

The project comprised case studies of five very different rural communities in different Australian States. The communities were selected on the advice of expert informants as examples of good practice, and to reflect diversity in terms of population size, industry base, school provision (primary only, area schools, separate high schools, private schools), geographic isolation, and level of maturity of the school–community partnership. Three data collection techniques were used: semi-structured interviews, observation, and written documentation collected from school and community sources. Interviews asked for people's perceptions of their local school and community, and of the capacity of each to respond to or initiate change. Specific questions were then asked regarding the nature, outcomes and likely sustainability of school–community linkages, and the extent to which leadership and other factors influenced the partnership. These techniques generated rich qualitative data which were then analysed with the aid of the NUD\*IST (Non-Numeric Unstructured Data Information Searching and Theorising) computer software program. After data analysis was completed, preliminary findings were presented at community meetings in each study site, and participants were invited to have input into the drafting of recommendations, which informed the final report.

## Outcomes

Rural school–community partnerships deliver a variety of positive outcomes for youth and for the community, including the provision of training that meets both student and community needs, improved school retention, increased retention of youth in rural communities, positive environmental outcomes, cultural and recreational benefits from sharing physical and human school resources, and economic outcomes in terms of the school as a key employer and consumer of local goods and services. Whilst these tangible outcomes are important to the sustainability of many small rural communities, the potentially more valuable outcomes from school–community partnerships are increased individual and community capacity to influence their own futures. In particular, the development of VET-in-schools programs in rural communities, and the community-wide benefits that flow from such programs, represent an important vehicle for building community capacity.

Rural schools help to build individual and community capacity by facilitating interactions which build social capital. Social capital comprises knowledge resources and identity resources. *Knowledge resources* refer to knowledge of who, when and where to go for advice or resources, and knowledge of how to get things done. They include internal and external community networks, availability of skills and knowledge, knowledge of community procedures and rules for getting things done, the existence of communication sites or interactional infrastructure, and knowledge of the values and attitudes of others in the community. Rural school–community partnerships build knowledge resources by: creating new networks or strengthening existing networks within the community; utilising and making others aware of the skills and knowledge available within the community; establishing clear and widely understood rules and procedures for getting things done; facilitating communication within the community, and providing opportunities for people with differing values and attitudes to come to appreciate each other’s viewpoints and work on shared projects.

*Identity resources* refer to the ability and commitment of individuals to act for the benefit of the community and its members. They include resources such as self-confidence and self-esteem, sharing of values and attitudes, the development of a shared vision, trust, and engendering a commitment to the community. Rural school–community partnerships build identity resources by: Building the self-confidence and self-esteem of youth and community members as they work on shared projects; facilitating some sharing of values and attitudes and building trust, particularly between young people and other community members; building on a foundation of shared values to develop a shared vision for the youth of the community and the community more broadly, and engendering community pride, commitment and self-efficacy by publicising successful school–community partnerships.

Effective leadership for school–community partnerships is a collective process through which school and community together develop and enact shared visions that reflect their collective needs and collective future. The process consists of five stages: trigger, initiation, development, maintenance, and sustainability. One or several individuals are usually responsible for triggering the school–community partnership by identifying a shared problem or opportunity. However, as the process enters the initiation stage, informal processes such as a community meeting, come into play, in order to mobilise school and community resources in order to address the problem or opportunity. At the development stage, formal processes are implemented to involve school and community, such as the formation of a management committee comprising school and community stakeholders. The fourth stage is maintenance, in which effective management of the partnership is facilitated by processes and resources that have been put in place. Finally, sustainability refers to the stage during which school and community review and renew their vision and goals, and scan for new opportunities and problems in relation to the partnership. The process is cyclical, in that the sustainability stage feeds back either to the trigger stage (where a new partnership begins) or to the initiation stage (where changes are made to the existing partnership).

Although leadership for effective school–community partnerships is a collective process involving all stakeholders, there are a number of key individuals who facilitate the leadership process. School Principals legitimise the partnership and provide initial and ongoing support, in terms of promoting within their schools an atmosphere of caring, respect and trust, and providing a school structure that promotes participative decision making. Other key players in school–community partnerships include school staff (particularly project coordinators such as coordinators of VET-in-schools programs), and community opinion leaders. Project coordinators often undertake the role of boundary crossers, in that they are well-known and respected community members who speak the language of both school and community ‘cultures’. Community opinion leaders include representatives from key community sectors such as local government, business and industry, service clubs, the school parent body, and, where relevant, Indigenous groups. These people tend to assume importance at the development, maintenance and sustainability stages of the partnership as the initiative gradually comes to be ‘owned’ by the community.

There are 12 indicators of effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership:

1. School Principals are committed to fostering increased integration between school and community.
2. School has in-depth knowledge of the community and resources available.
3. School actively seeks opportunities to involve all sectors of the community, including boundary crossers, and those who would not normally have contact with the school.
4. School has a high level of awareness of the value and importance to school–community partnerships of good public relations.
5. School Principals display a transformational leadership style which empowers others within the school and community and facilitates collective visioning.
6. School and community have access to and utilise extensive internal and external networks.
7. School and community share a vision for the future, centred on their youth.
8. School and community are open to new ideas, willing to take risks and willing to mould opportunities to match their vision.
9. School and community together play an active, meaningful and purposeful role in school decision making.
10. School and community value the skills of all in contributing to the learning of all.
11. Leadership for school–community partnerships is seen as the collective responsibility of school and community.
12. School and community both view the school as a learning centre for the whole community, which brings together physical, human and social capital resources.

## **Implications and recommendations**

### **Lessons for schools and communities**

#### **Lesson 1: *Value youth***

Communities in which all sectors value, share responsibility for, and are committed to the provision of opportunities for their youth, actively seek linkages with their local schools.

#### **Lesson 2: *Scan the horizon for new opportunities***

Schools and communities need to constantly scan the horizon for new opportunities, both within and outside the community, that will allow them to realise their shared vision, particularly those that will involve multiple community sectors working together. Schools and communities need to be prepared to mould opportunities to fit with *their* vision.

#### **Lesson 3: *Good school public relations are crucial***

School public relations are about two-way communication between school and community, ensuring the school is in tune with community concerns and aspirations. Public relations is an ongoing and shared activity involving all school staff and students, as well as the community.

#### **Lesson 4: *Provide opportunities and support for everyone to contribute***

Provide multiple opportunities for people to be involved in school and community activities, depending on their skills, abilities and self-confidence. In particular, ensure those new to the school and community are welcomed into the community.

**Lesson 5: *Encourage broad-based participation in school leadership processes***

Communities in which people from multiple sectors are encouraged to participate actively in (inclusive) school governance through P & F (P & C) and school council bodies lay the foundation for ongoing and mutually beneficial school–community partnerships.

**Lesson 6: *Get community leaders on side***

Identify and develop relationships between school and key community opinion leaders from all community sectors, particularly those sectors that have had little previous involvement with the school. In particular, target business and industry, local government, service and other voluntary groups, churches, Indigenous and ethnic groups.

**Lesson 7: *Nurture boundary crossers***

Boundary crossers play an important role in building and maintaining school–community partnerships, and also provide a sense of continuity that is so important to the sustainability of school–community partnerships. Identify and support existing and potential new boundary crossers in the community, and develop strong relationships between them and the school.

**Lesson 8: *Don't try to short circuit the process when developing school–community links***

Realise that building shared vision and commitment to school–community partnerships is developmental and, therefore, takes time and requires careful planning. Time spent at the beginning of the process is more likely to ensure the sustainability of linkages and the availability of capacity or social capital down the track.

**Lesson 9: *Involve external stakeholders from the beginning***

Involve external stakeholders, such as Departments of Education and other funding bodies, early in the process, and ensure two-way communication with them throughout. At the same time, schools and communities need to be proactive in shaping or changing policy in order to achieve school–community vision.

**Lesson 10: *Be flexible but maintain a degree of continuity***

Be flexible in changing structures within school and community to facilitate school–community partnerships (e.g. flexibility in school operating hours, flexibility in appointing staff to coordinate linkages, flexibility in terms of venues and times of meetings relating to school–community partnerships). At the same time, however, a degree of continuity in terms of resources is important to the development and sustainability of effective school–community partnerships.

**Recommendations for policy****Policy recommendation 1: *Provide for continuity***

- Seeding grants for the development of large-scale school–community partnerships should have a five-year lifecycle, in keeping with commercial business practice.
- Current levels of funding for the development, maintenance and sustainability of large-scale school–community partnerships should be reviewed, and increased levels of funding allocated (or redistributed from the ‘start-up’ stages) to allow for the maintenance and sustainability of school–community partnerships.

**Policy recommendation 2: *Support school entrepreneurship by better facilitating the seeking out and writing of funding applications***

- Additional financial resources should be provided to rural schools to allow them to seek opportunities and develop grant applications for external sources of funding.

**Policy recommendation 3: *Facilitate the appointment of school–community liaison officers***

- The position of school–community liaison officer should be created in each rural local government area or equivalent, to service schools and communities in that area. This position

should be jointly funded by the Federal Government (through sources such as *Regional Solutions*), local government and the schools. The role of the community liaison officer will be to facilitate school–community partnerships, including sourcing and accessing funding for school–community initiatives.

**Policy recommendation 4: *Refocus VET-in-schools programs to include rural community development***

- Annual evaluations of VET-in-schools programs should use a variety of measures to assess the effectiveness of the program, including both qualitative and quantitative data, and consideration of the longer term outcomes.
- The role of VET-in-schools programs in contributing to rural community development needs to be measured, documented, formally recognised, and appropriately resourced.

**Policy recommendation 5: *Review school insurance policies and help meet the costs of public liability insurance***

- State Departments of Education should review school insurance policies to ensure students are adequately covered while engaged in VET-in-schools activities on and off school premises.
- State Government and/or Federal Governments should contribute towards the cost of public liability insurance for small employers in rural communities who provide regular work placements for VET-in-schools students.

**Policy recommendation 6: *Ensure policy flexibility***

- Policy makers need to build flexibility into policies, to take into account the particular problems faced by rural schools and communities, and to allow rural schools and communities to maximise on their strengths and available resources.

**Policy recommendation 7: *Ensure appropriate support is provided for all rural schools to establish and maintain community linkages***

- Both government and independent schools in rural areas should be encouraged and supported to develop further linkages with each other, with rural and other industry, and with community groups.

**Policy recommendation 8: *Facilitate transformational and distributive leadership***

- Rural leadership programs should consider the value and potential contribution of rural schools. Discussion of the leadership processes of the interventions and the lessons outlined in this report should be incorporated into the programs. Programs should explore and develop personal values in order to facilitate participation in the leadership process, and should develop skills in communicating, compromising and negotiating.
- Professional development should be available for all school staff (Principals and senior staff, teachers, ancillary staff) in the special role of rural schools in their communities. Programs should include discussion of the leadership processes of the interventions and the lessons outlined in this report. They should explore and develop personal values in order to facilitate participation in the leadership process, and should develop skills in communicating, compromising and negotiating.
- State parent bodies, with appropriate financial support from Federal and State Governments, should provide leadership training to support parental participation in school decision making. Training should explore and develop personal values in order to facilitate participation in the leadership process, and should develop skills in communicating, compromising and negotiating.

# 1. Introduction

## Background to the project

Many rural communities are in crisis. They must deal with the rapid pace of change in terms of globalisation of the economy and changing world markets, which have brought about a decline in traditional industries such as agriculture, mining and manufacturing. Associated with this, are the attendant problems of unemployment and declining population, and, in particular, a drain of youth from the country to the city. Despite these challenges, rural Australia and its people remain a vital national asset.

In order to survive this rapid rate of change, and to ensure community sustainability, it has been suggested that rural communities need to focus on long-term rather than short-term, and internal rather than external 'solutions', based on strengthening linkages within their communities (Lane & Dorfman 1997). The study reported in this paper explores the role of rural schools, which are one of the major organisational/government services remaining in rural areas, in building and sustaining strong school–community partnerships. It also considers the influence of school and community leadership on such linkages.

Increasingly, schools are the major industry/government service presence in rural areas, particularly given the continuing departure of banks and other services. Education in rural communities has been identified as a priority issue by the National Farmers' Federation, as well as by state Departments of Education. Whilst the provision of education in rural areas has direct benefits in terms of educational outcomes, there are benefits to communities from rural schools which are not well understood. Although schools have generally played an active role in rural communities, they have often been constrained by educator and community expectations that limit learning opportunities within the parameters of the school walls and textbooks (Miller 1995).

Research conducted by the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) into social capital in rural communities suggests that the quantity and quality of interactions between various individual and institutional players in communities influences the social and economic outcomes of those communities (CRLRA 2000; 2001). Frequent interactions across a diverse range of groups which have a shared purpose and which involve the participants in learning about themselves and others are the most likely to build social capital. School staff, most of whom may come from outside the community, can enhance community diversity and the range of skills and knowledge available in the community. Rural schools provide one of the major opportunities for interaction in rural communities, interactions which frequently have a purpose of benefit to the community.

A pilot project conducted by the CRLRA and the Leadership for Learning Research Group (LLRG) at the University of Tasmania investigated the impact of various leadership styles and leadership characteristics on the relationship between schools and communities (Johns et al. 2000). This research focused on the relationship between school and community leadership and building community social capital and found that a strong partnership between local schools and their communities is an important tool in generating social capital. However, effective school–community partnerships do not happen by chance; they are carefully planned and involve high levels of commitment and energy from both groups of participants.

## **How might schools contribute to communities?**

The contribution of rural schools to their communities is potentially extensive, ranging from the tangible and measurable to the less tangible and more difficult to measure. Miller (1991; 1995) described the contribution of rural schools to community as a partnership consisting of three inter-related components: school as a community centre; community as curriculum, and school-based enterprise.

## **What are the ingredients for successful school–community partnerships?**

The pilot study provided some insight into the indicators of the effectiveness of school–community partnerships: strong commitment to the partnership from school and community leaders; a high level of cohesiveness within the schools and within the community; a shared school and community belief that the partnership is viewed as long-term and integral to community development; wide-ranging and ongoing involvement by community members in all aspects of the school’s organisation and management; wide-ranging and ongoing involvement of school students and staff in a range of community activities; strong sense of ownership of the school by the community, and high visibility of the school within the community. In summary, from the pilot project, two factors appear to have significant impact on the success of school–community partnerships: leadership and having a sense of shared community.

## **What benefits will come from this project?**

Social and economic benefits can be expected from implementation of the recommendations of the project. Social benefits will flow to communities which work together with effective leadership for common community purposes such as the provision of local services and recreation opportunities for youth and others in the community. Internationally renowned research by Putnam (1993), as well as CRLRA research (Kilpatrick, Bell & Falk 1999; Kilpatrick, Falk & Harrison 1998; Kilpatrick & Bell 1998), finds that economic, as well as social benefits, flow from communities with high levels of social capital. Communities with high levels of social capital are better able to take advantages of opportunities for economic development. Schools are the major institution in many rural communities. This research will fill a gap in our knowledge of how social capital can be built using the resources and opportunities provided by schools, and the role of leadership in small communities in particular.

This research is of potential benefit to all rural industries. The 220 000 farm households in rural Australia (Garnaut & Lim-Applegate 1998) rely on rural communities to provide social and economic infrastructure and services, including education. The National Farmers’ Federation study of rural communities in each state (Harrison 1997) found community concern with the decline of rural communities and the associated reduction in provision of services, especially health, education and banking services in rural communities.

Information on the contribution of rural schools to their communities beyond traditional forms of education of young people, which will assist policy makers when making decisions about: the provision of education services in rural communities; the integration of education, health and other services in rural communities; and decisions about implementation of rural and community development programs. Some recommendations could feed into the Rural Leadership Program and educational leadership courses on strategies and modes of leadership and so enhance school and community partnerships for the benefit of rural communities.

It is likely that rural schools, working in partnership with local leaders and residents, can have a positive impact on community viability. This is especially so when staff and students working alongside adults in the community, are given meaningful opportunities to engage in community-based learning that serves the needs of the school and its students. By building the social capital of the school and youth, the community not only helps to develop responsible citizens, but also creates opportunities for tomorrow’s rural leaders to emerge. However, without building strong support

among community organisations, groups, individuals, leaders and storing up that support through policy development, it is unlikely community-based program initiatives with schools will last. Policy provides the basis upon which a program can sustain support over time (Miller, 1995). The research aims to ensure such policy is informed by how, what and why schools contribute to the social capital of rural communities.

## **Objectives and research questions**

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the project are:

1. To examine the extent and nature of the contribution of rural schools to their communities' development beyond traditional forms of education of young people, including: the use of the skills and knowledge of the school staff in initiating, organising and/or running wider community activities and projects; the opportunities provided for adults in the community for personal development and skill acquisition through involvement in school activities and school bodies such as school councils; and the importance of the physical school resources to small communities.
2. To investigate the ways in which the modes of leadership of the school and community leaders influence the extent and nature of the school's contribution to the community.
3. To consider the constraints to schools being put to other uses.

### **Research questions**

The six research questions, developed from the objectives, are:

1. What is the nature and extent of the contribution of rural schools to their community's development, beyond traditional forms of education for young people?
2. How does school and community leadership influence the nature and extent of school contributions to the community?
3. How do education system policies and procedures, and other factors outside the control of the school and its community, affect the contribution of rural schools to their communities?
4. What other factors influence the contribution of rural schools to their communities?
5. What are the indicators of:
  - (a) effective school–community partnerships, and
  - (b) effective leadership in school–community partnerships?
6. How can effective school–community partnerships be developed and maintained?

## **Structure of this report**

Chapter 2 overviews literature on school–community partnerships and relevant research on school and community leadership. Chapter 3 describes the selection of the five study sites and the case study methodology used in the project. Chapters 4 to 8 present case studies of each of the five selected schools and their communities. Each case study starts with a description of the community and focal school, then describes the contributions that the school makes to its community before discussing the factors that influence that contribution, paying particular attention to the role of leadership in the contribution processes. Although an integral part of this report, the case studies have also been written as stand-alone documents. For this reason, references are provided at the end of each case study, rather than in the Reference List at the end of this report. Chapter 9 draws together the findings from the five sites and answers the first five research questions re the nature and extent of the contribution of rural schools to their community's development, school and community leadership influences on the nature and extent of school contributions to the community, external systemic and other influencing factors, internal factors which influence the school–community



partnership, and how to identify, develop and maintain effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership. The final chapter answers the sixth research question (How can effective school–community partnerships be developed and maintained?) by documenting ten lessons for schools and communities wanting to build and maintain effective school–community partnerships, and for policy makers. This chapter includes a list of recommendations that follow from the research findings.

## 2. Literature review

### Introduction

Most existing research on school–community partnerships considered outcomes in terms of improved educational outcomes for youth (see, for example, Knight cited in Evers & Chapman 1995). Such research focused on the way in which the community contributes to the school. However, as this literature review will demonstrate, there is a smaller body of research that looks at the broader implications of school–community partnerships in terms of the social and economic benefits for rural communities. Our study builds on this research, by focusing on these non-educational outcomes of school–community partnerships, and by shifting the focus to concentrate on school contributions to communities rather than community contributions to schools.

### School–community partnerships and the Australian context

This study is set within the wider context of an increasing recognition by State/Territory and Commonwealth education and training authorities of the significant educational and social benefits to be gained from fostering the development of school–community partnerships. This is represented by the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* at which all States/Territories and the Commonwealth agreed to ‘further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community’ (MCEETYA 1999, p. 2). Building on this declaration, other key Commonwealth and State bodies involved in the provision and funding of education and training, have developed policy to support and strengthen school–community partnerships (see, for example, the Tasmanian Department of Education’s *Learning Together* (2001) document, and *Bright Futures for Young Australians: Community partnerships for the future of successful transitions* produced by the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (1999) which has since become the Enterprise and Career Education Foundation.

At the same time, this study is also set within the context of an increasing focus on rural issues, including the provision of education, health, communications, banking and other services. Within this context, issues under consideration include access and equity for those living in rural and regional Australia, as well as the need to build capacity within rural communities to allow individuals and groups to take responsibility for their future. Commonwealth Government initiatives to address these issues in relation to rural education include the introduction of the Country Area Program (CAP), known in some states as Priority Country Area Program (PCAP). The program provides funding to support shared activities between eligible rural schools and their communities in order to address issues of rural student access, participation and outcomes.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* conducted in 1999–2000 played an important role in further raising awareness of access, equity and other issues in rural and remote education. Amongst other initiatives, recommendations from the Review (HREOC 2000b) were responsible for the development of a draft National Framework for Rural and Remote Education, by the MCEETYA Taskforce on Rural and Remote Education, Training, Employment and Children’s Services (MCEETYA 2001). The Framework asserts that ‘the needs of rural and remote students should be met through local commitment and ownership as well as through predictable and sustained government funded initiatives’ (p. 6). It outlines six essential enablers of effective rural education: personnel, relevant curriculum, information communication technologies, multimode delivery, environments, and resourcing. A key focus of the Framework is on building capacity through school–community partnerships.

In their Review, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission also identified key access and equity issues relating specifically to the education of Indigenous students, including the need for culturally appropriate educational resources and teacher training (HREOC 2000a). Government initiatives currently in place to address these concerns include the Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) program introduced in 1990, Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) which commenced in 1997, and the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy launched in March 2000. At a meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in March 2000, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education devised and expressed their support for a national statement of principles and standards for more culturally inclusive schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (MCEETYA 2000a), and a model of more culturally inclusive and educationally effective schools (MCEETYA 2000b). At the heart of both documents is the need to build public confidence in education by encouraging partnerships between the school and Indigenous parents and caregivers. In addition, the model of more culturally inclusive and educationally effective schools (MCEETYA 2000b) provides explicit guidelines regarding the roles of the community and of the school (in terms of leadership, environment, organisation, professional development and curriculum) in fostering this partnership.

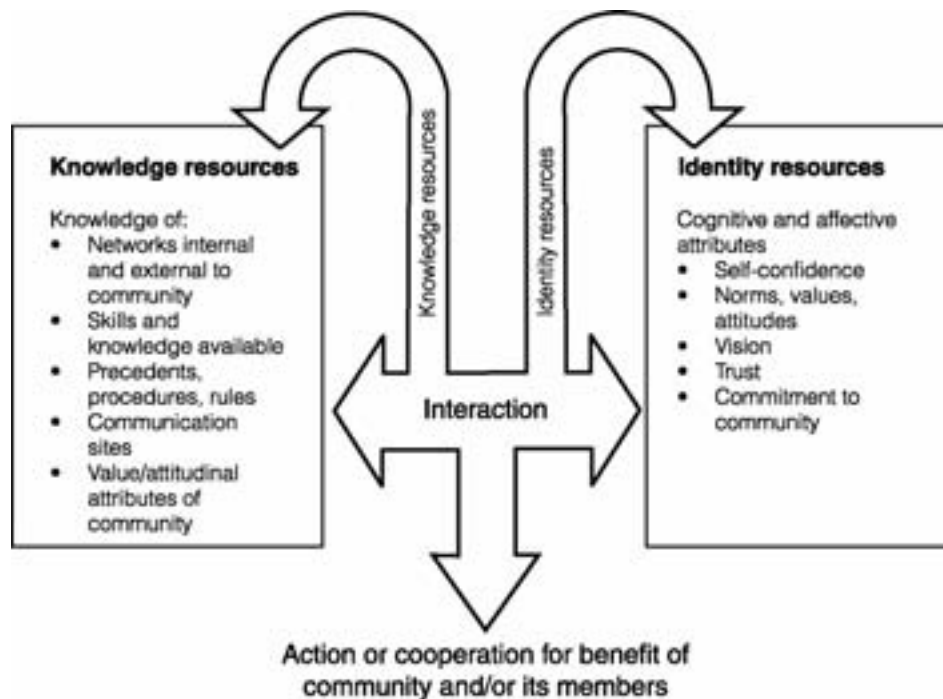
## **Rural community development and social capital**

Rural community development is about enhancing and ensuring a balance between economic, social and environmental development. As a recent study by Kenyon and Black (2001) noted, the positive outcomes for communities include stabilisation or increase in population, retention of youth, diversification in terms of employment and industry base, and increased community pride and civic participation. Rural community development is about allowing rural communities to take control of their future, by recognising and fostering further development of existing community capacity (Cavaye 1999). Recent research (see, for example, OECD 2001) has suggested that sustainable economic and social development is realised through the development of human capital (individual skills) as well as social capital (social networks).

The concept of social capital has gained prominence in recent years, both within Australia (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000) and internationally (OECD 2001; Woolcock & Narayan 2000; Putnam 1993), as a way of analysing community capacity in order to explain the success of community renewal efforts in some communities. Specifically, social capital refers to the 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups' (OECD 2001, p. 41). Woolcock and Narayan (2000) noted that the focus of recent community development research on social capital represents a significant departure from earlier approaches which saw little relationship between social relationships and economic development.

Social capital is built through interactions within and outside communities, and research by Woolcock (1999) identified three types of interactions as important dimensions of social capital. These interactions are defined as bonding (family, ethnic groups), bridging (distant friends, associates, colleagues), and linking (interactions between those from different social groupings). Recent research by Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) identified two kinds of resources which people bring to interactions that are intended to result in some action for mutual benefit: knowledge and identity resources. Knowledge resources are a knowledge of who, when and where to go for advice or resources and knowledge of how to get things done. They relate to networks, and an understanding of procedures and how people work effectively together. Identity resources are being able and willing (committed) to act for the benefit of the community and its members. They include self-confidence, norms such as reciprocity, trust, and values and visions that are shared between the parties to the interaction. Falk and Kilpatrick's model of building and using social capital is reproduced below.

### **FIGURE 1: CRLRA model of building and using social capital**



Source: Falk, I. & Kilpatrick, S. 2000, 'What is social capital? A study of rural communities', *Sociologica Ruralis*, vol. 40, no. 1, p. 101.

Opportunities for individuals and groups in rural communities to interact are important, because they allow people to use their social capital for mutually beneficial actions, and also help to build or strengthen community social capital. However, as Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) pointed out, the quality of the outcomes possible from interactions depends on the quality of the social capital resources that are used.

### Measuring social capital

A review of the literature on social capital suggests that typical ways of measuring social capital focus on levels of trust or social interaction (see, for example, Black & Hughes 2001; Putnam 2000; Falk & Guenther 1999). However, as cautioned in the OECD (2001) report, further research is needed into the measurement of social capital because

[m]uch of what is relevant to social capital is tacit and relational, defying easy measurement or codification (p. 43).

In their recent study, Black and Hughes (2001) identified a number of indicators for measuring social capital. These indicators relate to three broad areas: patterns of processes, qualities of processes, and structures that govern or enhance processes. Patterns of processes include measurement of levels of social and civic participation, volunteerism, and the extent of linkages (focusing on what Woolcock (1999) identified as bridging and linking ties). Qualities of processes include measurement of levels of trust and reciprocity, and the extent to which norms and values are shared. The CRLRA model of social capital presented above (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000) highlights these and a number of other qualities or dimensions of social capital. Black and Hughes' (2001) third set of indicators, structures that govern or enhance processes, include leadership and conflict resolution structures and processes. The links between leadership and social capital have been the focus of recent and ongoing research (see, for example, Falk & Smith forthcoming; Falk & Mulford 2001; CRLRA 2000, 2001), and are particularly relevant for our study.

### Sources and outcomes of social capital in rural communities

The recent OECD (2001) study into human and social capital listed a number of sources of social capital, including families, schools, communities, workplaces, and associations and voluntary

organisations. Schools as a source of social capital will be discussed in the next section. Research into the way in which social capital enhances community well-being has found that positive outcomes in relation to education, physical and mental health, lower crime rates, and better and more inclusive government, flow to communities with high levels of social capital (OECD 2001). Temple (2001) cited research that suggested links between social capital and economic growth, but calls for more research into this area. Overall, Falk & Kilpatrick (2000) noted that community learning is both a source and an outcome of social capital formation for rural communities.

### **Rural schools and social capital**

There are several compelling reasons why schools (and other institutions of learning) would seem well placed to help build and sustain social capital in rural communities. These are summarised in the OECD (2001) report:

Schools can foster values for social co-operation as well as providing ‘meeting places’ where various social networks can intersect ... To the extent that teaching methods and organisation of learning encourage shared learning and teamwork as well as openness to new ideas and cultural diversity, the more schools can underpin social capital which bridge across different groups in society (p. 46).

### **How do rural schools impact on their communities?**

An extensive literature review into the non-educational outcomes of rural school–community partnerships (Salant & Waller 1998) concluded that ‘[s]chools have positive economic and social impacts, provide a resource for community development and offer a delivery point for social services’ (p. 2). At the same time, the authors noted that very few of these studies were objective or analytical. Salant and Waller (1998) found that most of the research they had reviewed on school–community partnerships used a case study methodology, and was either descriptive (that is, it documented the types of linkages that had been formed), or it suggested, rather than documented, the impacts of school–community partnerships. They also noted that most studies were driven by economic imperatives (that is, by government pressure to consolidate small rural schools).

Salant and Waller’s categorisation of existing studies into the non-educational impact of schools on rural communities is a useful one, and will form the basis for the remainder of this section. They identified five broad categories of research, each of which had a different focus. The categories were: economic impacts, social impacts, the school as an arena for local politics, the school as a delivery point for health services, and the school as a resource for community development.

#### **Economic impacts**

Salant and Waller (1998) found few examples of objective research which measured the economic impacts of rural schools on their communities. An Australian study that measured the economic impact of three rural high schools was conducted in the Wimmera District of Victoria (Nunn 1994). Nunn found, amongst other things, that 39 per cent of the combined gross income of teachers from the three schools was spent in their local communities, and the same percentage of local school bus contractors’ income was also spent locally. A further review of the literature suggested that most researchers identified the economic impacts of rural schools on their communities, but did not actually measure the extent of their impact. Such research is typified by Squires and Sinclair (1990), who identified the following economic impacts of rural schools on their communities: the school provides employment; it contributes to viability of local enterprises by using goods and services; and school staff represent regular cash income which may not be common in some rural communities. Additionally, both Squires and Sinclair (1990) and Nunn (1994) noted the considerable economic contribution of schools who share facilities and other resources (physical and human) with their community.

## **Social impacts**

As noted by Salant and Waller (1998), most research into the social impacts of rural schools on their communities used a case study approach. For example, studies by Bowie (1998), Reynolds (1995) and Bryant and Grady (1990) identified the role of rural schools as unifying the community and affirming a sense of community identity, through school-based events such as the school play. These impacts were also identified by Squires and Sinclair (1990).

## **The school as an arena for local politics**

Salant and Waller (1998) noted that when local schools are closed, control and power shifts from local citizens to state administrators. This is then likely to lead to general feelings of powerlessness and apathy amongst rural communities, although Salant and Waller found no research on this issue.

## **The school as a delivery point for health and other services**

The concept of schools as delivery points for health services, in particular, developed in North America some thirty years ago (Gullotta & Noyes 1995), and the practice would seem to be more advanced there than in Australia. As Salant and Waller (1998) noted in their literature review, the concept of school-based health centres which typically offer a combination of primary health care, mental health services, family planning and health education would seem to be particularly suited to rural areas where schools occupy a central position. By delivering a range of health services, rural schools 'meet an important need in sparsely populated and remote areas where access to health care tends to be relatively restricted' (Salant & Waller 1998, p. 6). However, this is an area in which Salant and Waller (1998) noted that further, outcomes-based analysis is required, in order to assess the effectiveness of schools as delivery points for health services.

Similar research would also seem to be needed within Australia, given the need to focus on a whole-of-government approach to addressing rural and regional issues, as identified by speakers at the Regional Australia Summit in Canberra on 27–29 October 1999, and supported by a number of initiatives subsequently introduced by the current Federal Government as part of its Regional Australia Strategy. More specifically, at a national forum on Indigenous education in Alice Springs in November 1999, inter-agency cooperation involving schools and government services was identified as a key priority in improving Indigenous education (for a full review of the outcomes of the forum, see *Unicorn*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1999).

## **The school as a resource for community development**

This section encompasses and draws together the four categories of school contributions to their communities already discussed, and is particularly relevant for our study. In the last decade, several research studies (see, for example, Lane & Dorfman 1997; Jolly & Deloney 1996; Miller 1991, 1995) have focused specifically on the role of rural schools in community development. The focus of these studies has been on the interaction and collaboration between school and community that has created and sustained community social capital, by building the self-confidence and self-esteem of youth, by facilitating intergenerational trust, by giving adults the opportunity to utilise their skills for the good of the community, and by fostering a civic consciousness amongst youth (Miller 1995).

Miller (1991, 1995) identified three inter-related approaches to building strong school–community partnerships: school as a community centre, community as curriculum, and school-based enterprise. Miller's three inter-related approaches have also been used to analyse the contributions of rural schools to their communities in other research (see, for example, Glen, Cupitt & Fairley 1992). The *school as a community centre* approach utilises the school and its staff and students as a resource for lifelong learning and for the delivery of a variety of services such as health care, day care and dental treatment. By using the *community as curriculum* approach, students actively participate in community development through activities such as monitoring environmental land use and recording local history. School-to-work transition, or VET-in-schools programs, which link students and local employers, also fall into this category, and the issue of VET-in-schools programs as increasingly important vehicles for building community social capital will be considered separately in a later

section. Other researchers have also highlighted the importance to rural youth and their communities of rural curricula that reflect community values, traditions, aspirations, resources, and needs (see, for example, Nachtigal 1994; Squires & Sinclair 1990). Cumming (1992) distinguished two types of community as curriculum linkages. He described one group of linkages as common pathways (short-term activities focused on one curriculum area, such as a one-off environmental project designed to revegetate an identified local area). The second group he described as flexible pathways (long-term linkages which focus on developing broader skills in communication, problem solving and interpersonal skills, exemplified by a structured workplace learning program). Miller's (1991, 1995) third approach, *school-based enterprise*, refers to the development of entrepreneurial skills amongst students, who identify potential community needs and then establish a business to address those needs. This approach would include initiatives such as enterprise education and the Young Achievement Australia competition which have gained prominence in Australian schools in recent years.

A critique of Miller's work by Salant and Waller (1998) questioned the project's lack of 'tangible outcomes' and the complex relationship between youth, school and community which makes it difficult to clearly identify the impact of the school on rural community development. Their criticism regarding lack of tangible outcomes is not surprising given that, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, social capital is a difficult concept to measure, and is an area in which further research is required.

Two other key studies on the role of rural schools in community development are Jolly and Deloney (1996) and Lane and Dorfman (1997). Building on the earlier work of Coleman and Hoffer (1987), Jolly and Deloney (1996) noted that high levels of social capital and the existence of a functional community (one in which adults take an interest in and responsibility for the activities of children other than their own) are prerequisites for developing a 'symbiotic relationship between a school and a community' and that 'integrating school and community development efforts will produce a synergistic effect' (p. 25). A particular focus of Jolly and Deloney's (1996) study was the role of advanced telecommunications technology in building school social capital and in influencing the extent to which the school was able to contribute to community social capital.

Lane and Dorfman's (1997) study viewed school–community interaction as a tool that contributes to the creation and use of social capital in rural communities. They identified several ways in which rural schools can help to build community networks, including through the transmission of community norms (culture) and the facilitation of intergenerational links. Lane and Dorfman (1997) noted that community collaboration, in which the school was an equal player, contributes to the development and use of community social capital, and analysed the elements of effective collaborative community development processes. These processes would appear to have much in common with leadership processes, and will be considered later in the discussion on the influence of leadership in relation to school–community partnerships.

### **VET-in-schools programs and rural community development**

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's *National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* recommended, amongst other things, 'that education and training providers develop policies and funding formulas which encourage local and regional sharing of facilities and resources ...' (HREOC 2000b, p. 38). VET-in-schools programs are tangible evidence of the existence of such partnerships. VET-in-schools programs have grown rapidly within rural and urban schools in Australia over recent years, from 26 500 students in 1995 to 130 000 students in 1999 (Frost 2000). Accordingly, the VET-in-schools research base is still relatively new within Australia, and most existing research on the outcomes of VET-in-schools programs focuses on the education and training outcomes in terms of student pathways to further study and employment (see, for example, Misko & Slack 2001; Misko 1998; Lamb, Long & Malley 1998).

However, there is anecdotal evidence from some existing VET-in-schools initiatives in rural communities, such as the Schools Industry Links Outreach or SILO program (Rural Skills Australia

2000), and indications from existing research (for example, Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001; Misko 1998), that VET-in-schools programs have yielded additional benefits to rural communities, which have impacted on or are likely to impact on the levels of community social capital. Some of these community benefits include indications of increased youth retention in some rural communities, the provision of lifelong learning opportunities for adults and more positive attitudes to education and learning within the community, and opportunities for employers to contribute to the community. Scharaschkin (1995) and Cumming (1992) also highlighted increased collaboration between teachers and students, and between teachers and other teachers, workplace trainers and supervisors. Chiswell et al. (2001) noted that the provision of VET in small rural schools with limited facilities also encourages the development of partnerships and cluster arrangements involving a number of schools, other Registered Training Organisations, and local industry.

Clearly, further research is required in order to document the role of VET-in-schools programs in rural community development. However, the indications are that the development of such programs, in addition to providing education and training outcomes for youth, also stimulate relationships between school and community which cross traditional boundaries and which lay the foundation for building community social capital (Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001).

## **Leadership and school–community partnerships**

The literature indicates clearly that school–community partnerships do not come about by chance, but are the product of careful planning and development (see, for example, Lane & Dorfman 1997; Jolly & Deloney 1996; Cumming 1992). This section will therefore focus on the role of leadership in developing and sustaining effective school–community partnerships. Much has been written on leadership over the past thirty years or so, but it is beyond the scope of this literature review to undertake a detailed analysis of the various theories and models that have enjoyed popularity at different times and within different contexts. Instead, this discussion will overview four areas of particular relevance to the current study: changing paradigms of leadership; the leadership process and effective school–community partnerships; the role of individuals in facilitating the leadership process for school–community partnerships; and implications for leadership training.

### **Changing paradigms of leadership**

Barker (1997) summarised the three main schools of thought regarding leadership, namely leadership as: an ability, a relationship or a process. The traditional leadership paradigm viewed leadership as an *ability* (or set of traits or behaviours) possessed by certain individuals or ‘leaders’. This view was popular with leadership trainers because the leadership act could be reduced to a series of steps that could be taught. Barker (1997) considered this view of leadership to be based on confusion between management and leadership, and suggested that ‘[w]hen we think of the ability of leaders, we are probably thinking of the ability of leaders to manage’ (p. 6). He distinguished between management which creates stability and leadership which creates change, and argued that management can be viewed as a skill or set of behaviours, whereas leadership which deals with uncertainty and the unknown, cannot be viewed in this way. However, it is recognised that those people in formal leadership roles (for example, school Principals) engage in both management and leadership activities.

Leadership as a *relationship* emphasises leadership as a result of interaction between people. Rost (1993, p. 99) conceived of leadership in this way, as ‘an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes’ An important element of leadership, according to this view, is that both leaders and collaborators bring resources to the relationship that are useful for accomplishing their intended changes (Rost 1991). The relationship is multi-directional and not coercive. However, what separates leaders from collaborators is the power resources possessed by leaders which allow them to exercise greater influence (Rost 1991).



According to Barker (1997), the third view of leadership is that of a dynamic and collaborative *process* in which leadership roles are not clearly defined. This view represents a move away from the traditional leadership paradigm, in that it shifts the focus of leadership away from the role and influence of a designated 'leader', and towards a concept of leadership as a group process. Through the leadership process, which involves influencing, compromising and sacrificing, a new shared vision for the future is gradually developed to reflect the collective needs of the group (Barker 1997). Leadership is therefore created as individuals and groups interact and collaborate. The concept of leadership as a process represents a more recent leadership paradigm which challenges thinking about traditional leadership practices and training.

### **The leadership process and effective school–community partnerships**

Educational and rural community development policy direction in Australia is encouraging schools and communities to work together in ways never before considered, in order to determine their own futures. For both schools and communities, this means crossing traditional boundaries and making connections that 'go beyond traditional roles and community norms' (Lane & Dorfman 1997, p. 2). It would seem that the development of effective and sustainable school–community partnerships is most likely to be facilitated by a collective leadership process (Barker 1997), in which school and community together develop and enact a shared vision. However, the effectiveness of this process would seem to depend on the extent to which collaborative practices are already in place within the school and community. The following sections overview some recent literature as to what constitutes effective leadership for schools and communities.

#### ***School leadership***

The need for educators to foster collective leadership processes in order to bring about and support sustainable change within their schools, is supported by research into effective educational leadership. For example, Sergiovanni (1994) argued that sustainable school improvement efforts revolve around the concept of the school as a community rather than an organisation, and noted that an outcome of community building in schools is strengthening of other community institutions such as the family and the neighbourhood (community). He proposed that schools should become a community of leaders, in which leadership is defined as 'the exercise of wit and will, principle and passion, time and talent, and purpose and power in a way that allows the group to increase the likelihood that shared goals will be accomplished' (p. 170). In support of this view, Lambert (1998) argued that educational leadership is a reciprocal learning process amongst people who share goals and visions. Inherent in this process is active participation by teachers and parents, which is likely to come about through the redistribution of power and authority within the school, and the development of a culture in which everyone has the right and potential to be a leader. The notion of reciprocal leadership is also supported in the community development literature (see, for example, Langone & Rohs 1995).

The view of leadership as a collective, reciprocal process builds on Burns' (1978) transforming leadership, which he described as 'the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers' (p. 425). Central to this definition is that those involved in the process must either have mutual or similar goals, in other words, commitment to change.

More recent educational leadership research (see, for example, Bass 2000; Leithwood 1994) indicated that Burns' (1978) concept of commitment is central to what is now generally referred to as transformational leadership. This research argues that a transformational model of leadership facilitates effective school reform. As Leithwood (1994) noted, transformational leadership focuses on both first-order change (such as core practices within the school) and second-order change (influencing school culture, distributing leadership). First-order change is only likely to be sustainable if second-order change is also undertaken. Transformational leadership practices of school Principals and other formal school leaders include the development of a widely shared school

vision (Duke & Leithwood 1994; Mulford 1994); developing a collaborative culture which supports the school's vision (Deal & Peterson 1994; Duke & Leithwood 1994); fostering the commitment and capacity of staff (Duke & Leithwood 1994), high performance expectations, distributing responsibility for leadership, providing staff with collaborative planning time, and supporting collaboration with funding (Leithwood 1994). Of particular relevance is the recent work of Silins and Mulford (in press) and Bass (2000), which established a positive relationship between transformational leadership practices within schools and their level of organisational learning (or the extent of distributive leadership). Findings from the first phase of the Silins and Mulford study (reported in Silins, Mulford & Zarins 1999) document the key characteristics of schools which are learning organisations. These characteristics include a trusting and collaborative climate, willingness to take initiatives and risks, a shared and monitored school mission, and ongoing, relevant and challenging professional development.

### ***Community leadership***

Research indicates that rural communities in which change has been effectively implemented display a number of similarities, in terms of their participatory approach to decision making, cooperative community spirit, and deliberate transition of power to youth (Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). These communities make and implement their own decisions whilst at the same time recognising the importance of external resources (Cavaye 2000). Chrislip and Larson (1994), from their studies of a number of cases of community collaboration in North America, identified a number of key elements of successful collaboration, including broad-based community involvement, strong stakeholder groups, credibility and openness of the leadership process, and the need to overcome mistrust (and hence, build trust) between the stakeholders. As well as fostering widespread community participation, there is a need to form institutional partnerships between groups such as Chambers of Commerce, business and industry, schools, churches and government entities (Raftery 1993). In those communities where sustainable change has been effected, the leadership process facilitated the articulation of a common purpose or community vision, initiated commitment to the vision, and encouraged community participation in enacting the vision (Sorensen & Epps 1996). A collaborative model of community leadership (Chrislip & Larson 1994) bears similarities with Burns' (1978) transforming leadership discussed earlier, in that both focus on meeting the needs of all, and involve stakeholders working together as peers.

### ***Indigenous issues and leadership***

In speaking of the need for Indigenous community participation and leadership in educational decision making, Boston (1999) noted that “‘collaboration’, ‘partnership’ and ‘leadership’ are relatively new principles and there are thus few examples of successful initiatives truly and wholly based on these concepts’ (p. 35). In order to develop such partnerships, the recently developed model of more culturally inclusive and educationally effective schools (MCEETYA 2000b) identified leadership as a key factor. The model emphasises that effective partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities will be based on a collective understanding within the school, in the first instance, of the importance of the partnership, and will place responsibility for the introduction of new programs of school leaders. The partnership will have at its heart a consultative process, which will ensure that shared decision making between schools and communities is translated into the ‘everyday life of schools and local communities’ (Boston 1999, p. 36). Central to the process is the need for community partnerships to be reflected in teaching practice. This relates to the issue of the cultural appropriateness of teacher training, identified by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission *Review into Rural and Remote Education* (HREOC 2000a) and elsewhere, as a key issue in relation to Indigenous education. Citing several examples of effective school–community partnerships involving Indigenous communities, Boston (1999) noted that they have all been developed through a process of collaboration and shared decision making between the school, and the Indigenous (and, where relevant, non-Indigenous) communities. Boston (1999) argued that

[t]he strength of these approaches is that they turn upside down the traditional model of community involvement in education. They place the education provider in the context of the

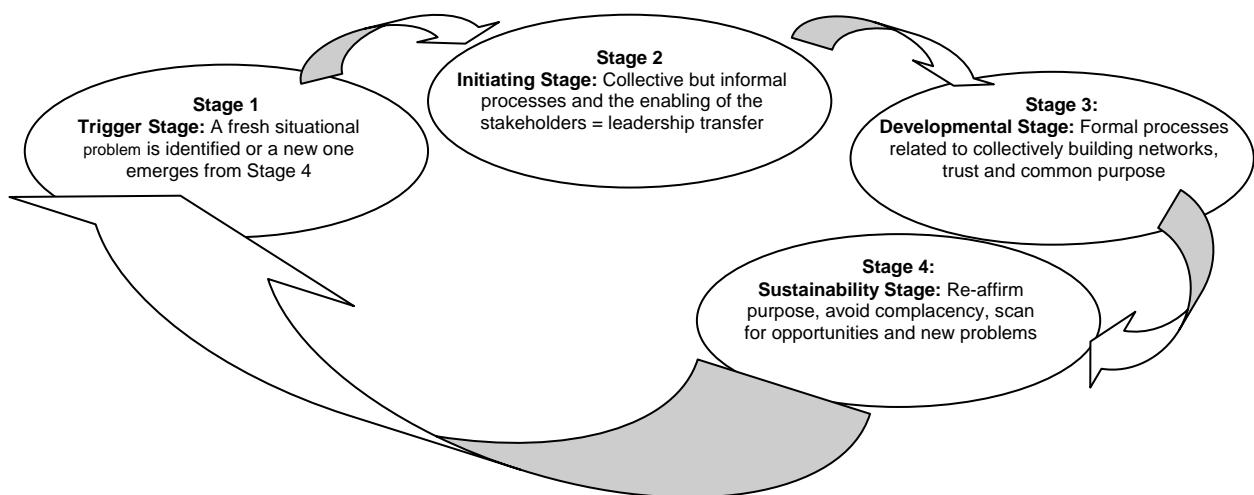
needs of the community. This puts the school in the community rather than the community in the school' (p. 37).

This view is very much in keeping with the focus of our research into the contributions of rural schools to their communities, and the significant community benefits that flow from such a partnership.

***School–community partnerships: Effective leadership for the future***

Effective educational leadership for the future, particularly within the context of vocational education and training, is considered in recent Australian research (Falk & Smith forthcoming; Falk & Mulford 2001; CRLRA 2000, 2001). This research again highlights that effective leadership is a collective process, which can be best described as ‘enabling’ leadership (Falk & Smith forthcoming; Falk & Mulford 2001) because it enables individuals to share in the leadership process. As enabling leadership is not the exclusive domain of one person, Falk and Smith (forthcoming) argued that its unit of analysis should be the leadership event, or intervention through which shared envisioning takes place. In the context of school–community partnerships, a leadership intervention comprises the development of a school–community linkage (for example, the development of a VET-in-schools program or an environmental project). The way in which leadership becomes a collective process over the course of the intervention (that is, the way in which individuals are ‘enabled’), is illustrated in Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2: The design of effective leadership intervention**



Source: Falk, I. & Smith, T. forthcoming, *Leadership in Vocational Education and Training: Leadership by design, not by default*, NCVER, Leabrook SA.

As recent research has shown (Falk & Mulford 2001; CRLRA 2001), enabling leadership facilitates the building and use of social capital by building internal networks, links between internal and external networks, historicity, shared visions, shared communication, and self-confidence. The leadership process, as represented in Figure 2, builds trust between network members, which Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) have identified as a clear leadership role. Chrislip and Larson’s (1994) study into collaborative leadership reported similar outcomes, in terms of civic increased civic engagement.

***The relationship between leadership and rural community development***

Lane and Dorfman (1997) argued that effective community development is a collaborative process which contributes to the development and use of social capital. They identified five dimensions of an effective community development process: collaborative and integrated involvement and participation; peer-based relationships among diverse stakeholders which are facilitated by a collaborative leader; multiple partners and multiple partnership levels; the community as the change

agent; and goals that are both process oriented (building social capital) and task oriented (using social capital to achieve goals). These dimensions, as Lane and Dorfman (1997) noted, can also be used to analyse school–community partnerships.

Lane and Dorfman (1997) conceived of the community development process as consisting of a number of sequential steps or stages. These are:

1. Initiate the partnership/collaboration
2. Identify/select coordinator/facilitator (collaborative leader)
3. Build partnership/collaboration
4. Develop a shared community vision
5. Develop an action plan based on shared vision
6. Initiate collaborative action
7. Review/renew vision and goals (p. 10).

These stages of the community development process bear a number of similarities with Falk and Smith's (forthcoming) collective leadership process illustrated in Figure 2. By conceiving of leadership as a collective process through which a shared vision is developed and enacted, the similarities between leadership and the community development process are very clear, as Barker (1994) noted. This further supports the argument being presented within this chapter, that rural schools can and do play a key role in rural community development through the development of school–community partnerships.

### **Who facilitates the leadership process for school–community partnerships?**

Whilst recent and ongoing research views leadership as a collective process rather than the province of one or several designated 'leaders', quite clearly there are a number of key individuals and groups within schools and communities charged with the responsibility of facilitating the leadership process. These people include, but are not restricted to, formal school leaders (most notably school Principals), project coordinators, other school staff, and community leaders (who Chrislip and Larson (1994) identified as the mayor or chief executive officers of community organisations). In addition to supporting and legitimising the collaboration, these key players play an active role in inspiring commitment and action, and in building and sustaining broad-based community involvement. A brief discussion of the role of key players in the leadership process is provided below.

#### ***School Principals***

Research by Bowie (1998) into the contributions of four rural primary schools to their communities, highlighted the critical role of the Principal in the development and sustainability of school–community partnerships. This finding is supported by other research which linked effective school–industry programs to visionary Principals (Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999), and which found that the success of the linkage was directly related to the Principals' level of commitment (Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001). In schools where another staff member championed the school–community partnership instead of the Principal, Malley, Frigo and Robinson (1999, p. 12) found that 'there was a more tenuous acceptance' of the partnership. However, as Cumming (1992) noted, the Principals' level of support and involvement changed over time. They were actively involved in initiating school–community partnerships by providing resources, and raising school and community awareness of the rationale and intended outcomes of the activity. Following this stage, however, they withdrew from a visible hands-on role so as not to be seen dominating the direction of the activity.

#### ***Project coordinators***

Research has identified project coordinators as key players in the leadership process for school–community partnerships (Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001; Cumming 1992). Those in charge of coordinating specific school–community partnerships (for example, VET coordinators) played a significant role in the implementation and maintenance of those linkages. Cumming (1992) noted a number of characteristics common to coordinators, including openness to new ideas, good

communication and persuasion skills, good people skills, and the ability to critically reflect on effective teaching and learning strategies. He also noted that coordinators typically engaged in network building activities, and because of their involvement in a number of overlapping activities in relation to education, training and community affairs, were able to move freely across school and community boundaries.

### *School staff*

While the Principal plays a central role in legitimising and supporting school–community partnerships, research also indicates the critical role of other school staff in determining the sustainability of such partnerships (see, for example, Johns et al. 2000; Bowie 1998). In particular, such research noted the importance of staff in rural schools having an understanding of the community in which their school is located, and suggested that such an understanding is likely to be built in several ways, including through induction programs and school cluster support, and through professional development activities (Bowie 1998). Commenting specifically on teachers involved in VET-in-schools programs in rural Tasmanian schools, Kilpatrick, Bell and Kilpatrick (2001) also called for staff professional development in relation to network building and workplace communication skills.

### *Community leaders*

Sorensen and Epps (1996) noted that community leaders may be drawn from a variety of institutional groups including business and industry, local government, and church groups, but that they may be drawn from other sources also. In particular, Cumming (1992) noted the importance to rural communities of a collaborative approach involving the education and business sectors, and noted that such an approach must be supported at both a managerial and operational level in both school and community. He found that collaborative processes are often facilitated by the formation of a management committee comprising representatives drawn from all sectors of the community, including the business sector. Other research (Mitchell 1998) highlighted the importance of local governments in the leadership process. In particular, Mitchell (1998) noted that support (both financial and other) from the local/shire council is critical to the development of school–community partnerships, although this source of support is often overlooked when community development initiatives are being planned.

## **Implications for leadership training**

The preceding discussion of leadership has provided evidence to support the argument that leadership capacity (or lack of it) is a key factor influencing the development of effective school–community partnerships. Research indicates that it is necessary to develop leadership capacity within schools and communities, in order to facilitate collective leadership processes (see for example, Lambert 1998; Barker 1997). For schools these strategies include the need to: ensure staff know one another, build trusting relationships amongst staff, develop a school culture of collaborative enquiry and continuous improvement, and anticipate professional development needs (Lambert 1998). For school and community members, research suggests that leadership training needs to focus on personal development (self-motivation, self-direction and self-identity) and the development of political skills such as communication, coalition building and negotiation (Barker 1997).

## **Other factors which influence the development of effective school–community partnerships**

In addition to the influence of leadership, which has been discussed at length in the preceding section, there are a number of other key elements or building blocks for effective school–community partnerships. Schorr (1997) summarised a number of these elements: successful programs are not mandated by policy but respond to community needs; they rely on the community’s own resources and strengths; they draw extensively on outside resources for funding, technical expertise and to influence policy; they have a long-term orientation and continue to evolve over time; and they are based on strong relationships based on mutual trust and respect which are sustained by institutional

support. Although her study focused on long-term strategies for strengthening school–community partnerships in inner city neighbourhoods in North America, Schorr’s (1997) lessons would seem to hold true for rural school–community partnerships also. Other factors identified in the literature as influencing the school–community partnership include size of the school (Jolly & Deloney 1996; Combs & Bailey 1992), size of the community and proximity of the school to the community (Combs & Bailey 1992), continuity of resources (CRLRA 2000, 2001; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999; Bowie 1998; Barr 1997) and the importance of publicity (Carlsmith & Railsback 2001; Miller 1995; Combs & Bailey 1992).

The remainder of this section will focus on what appear from the literature to be three key factors influencing school–community partnerships: policy, continuity of resources, and school public relations. It will then conclude with an overview of some of the specific issues influencing the development of partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities.

### *The influence of policy*

Essentially policy refers to ‘permission’ and /or resources which determine the sustainability of school–community partnerships (Miller 1995). Rural school–community partnerships are potentially affected by a large number of education and other government department policies, including those relating to VET-in-schools programs, community participation in school governance; community development initiatives such as the [Priority] Country Area Program (CAP/PCAP), and access and equity programs for targeted groups such as Indigenous Australians (for example, the Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) program). The purpose of these policies is to encourage greater school–community partnerships by providing funding and other forms of support, and, generally speaking, they would appear to be successful in achieving this aim.

However, limited research to date on policy introduced in most Australian States mandating school self-management through school councils, suggests that in many cases this initiative has not yet resulted in shared school decision making between teachers, parents, community members and (in some cases) students. For example, Bowie (1998), in her study of four Victorian rural primary schools, found that school self-management had not significantly increased community participation in school governance, even though levels of community involvement in fundraising and physical maintenance of the school buildings were high. She concluded that the knowledge and experience inherent in rural communities was not being fully recognised and drawn on, and that partnerships were not yet an integral part of Australian school culture, although noted that the situation was gradually changing. Existing research reporting positive outcomes of widespread participation in school governance, at this stage appears to relate mainly to increased student learning outcomes, and improved quality of education for disadvantaged groups (Knight cited in Evers & Chapman 1995).

Schorr (1997) found that many effective school–community partnerships exist because they have ‘bent the rules’ in order to address the ‘mismatch between the attributes of effective programs and the [policy] imperatives of prevailing systems’ (p. 18). This finding accords with earlier research by Miller (1995), who found that school–community partnerships of necessity frequently involved a departure from established procedures and practices, and from traditional mindsets regarding the role of the school. Malley, Frigo and Robinson (1999) also reported similar findings in relation to the development of school–industry programs. Miller (1995) concluded that ‘it becomes imperative to develop policy support from those organizations and individuals whose endorsement may be critical to the success of program efforts’ (p. 6). Strategies for developing policy support include the need to build coalitions comprising a ‘broad cross-section of individuals, groups, and organizations’ (p. 11); to recognise that change takes place slowly and requires long-term commitment; and to ensure public officials understand all the issues relating to the policy (Miller 1995).

### *Continuity of resources*

A number of studies highlight the influence of financial resources (or lack of them) as influencing the development and sustainability of school–community partnerships. These concerns relate largely to

VET-in-schools programs (see, for example, CRLRA 2000, 2001; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999). As noted earlier in this chapter, the role of Principals and school staff is critical to the success of school–community partnerships, and so issues of staff stability and length of time staff in the community assume importance (Bowie 1998). Not surprisingly, continuity of human resources is an issue that features often in the literature on effective school–community partnerships (CRLRA 2000, 2001; Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001; Johns et al. 2000; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999; Bowie 1998). Continuity of human resources influences the sustainability of school–community partnerships by providing links with the past and familiarity with the vision, and by assuring the continuation of established relationships and of a culture which supports and facilitates collaboration (Barr 1997).

### ***Public relations***

Miller (1995) noted that publicity on a continuing basis of the positive results of projects involving school and community is important, as it builds community support for and commitment to the school–community partnership. Coupled with this, are findings from Combs and Bailey (1992) who noted that support for school–community partnerships is influenced by the community’s perceptions of the importance of education and the local school system, and by the flow of communication between school and community. Taken together, the findings from Miller (1995) and Combs and Bailey (1992) described what it now more commonly known as public relations (Carlsmith & Railsback 2001). Public relations today differs from earlier definitions which were more akin to publicity, in that the communication from school to community was one-way. As Carlsmith and Railsback (2001) noted:

Today, school public relations is less about conveying information than it is about establishing and promoting partnerships within the community. An effective school public relations plan provides value by giving people information they can use, not just information that the school needs to convey about process. Effective public relations means schools ask for and receive information just as much as they transmit it (p. 7).

School public relations comprises a variety of activities which focus on interactivity and engagement between school and community. These activities include:

- Promoting community input
- Anticipating image problems; providing solutions
- Designing all levels of communications
- Conducting public relations research, surveys, and polls
- Training employees in the importance of public relations (Carlsmith & Railsback 2001).

The literature suggests that an effective and widely-communicated public relations strategy is central to successful school–community partnerships (see, for example, Carlsmith & Railsback 2001; Combs & Bailey 1992). Effective public relations programs are supported by an open and collegial school culture. Characteristics include the commitment and involvement of all school staff members in public relations; the school’s physical appearance which should be open, helpful and friendly; use of a number of different communication sources including a web site, newsletters and press releases; encouragement and support for parental participation, and constant outreach efforts to those not normally involved with schools, such as businesses or community members who no longer have school-aged children (Carlsmith & Railsback 2001).

### ***Indigenous issues***

As the literature indicates, there is still much work to be done in the development of effective partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities (Boston 1999). At the heart of this work will be the development of collaborative leadership processes for which schools will need to take the initiative. This was discussed earlier in the section on leadership. In addition, policy continues to support the development of school partnerships with Indigenous communities, as outlined in the

introduction to this chapter, and noted again in the discussion on the role of policy above. Research also indicates that effective partnerships are likely to be increased by attention to a number of issues, including the need to: remove barriers that have prevented Indigenous parents from becoming involved in the school (e.g. negative school experiences from their own childhood); fully involve Indigenous parents in efforts aimed at increasing school attendance; increase the number of Indigenous teaching staff; and develop strong, high-level partnerships with Indigenous leaders and communities (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). While these issues relate to factors that influence the school's partnership with Indigenous communities, it would seem that they are also relevant to other marginalised or potentially marginalised groups within the community, including those from different ethnicities or lower socio-economic groupings.

## **Conclusion**

In attempting to find local solutions to local concerns, rural communities must utilise all available resources. This chapter has examined the role of the school as one such resource, albeit one that has been under-utilised in the past. However, effective school–community partnerships do not come about by chance, but through a carefully planned leadership process, which allows school and community to gradually develop and enact a vision which represents their collective needs and collective future. The process is legitimised by school Principals, and facilitated by key individuals within the school and community, including school Principals, project coordinators, and representatives from business and local government sectors. The development and sustainability of effective school–community partnerships rely on the extent to which rural schools and communities learn how to adapt, work around, and shape policy. At the heart of effective partnerships are good school–community public relations. Evidence presented in this chapter indicates that as schools and communities learn together, social capital is created and used, resulting in increased individual and community capacity. This supports the view that the development and sustainability of school–community partnerships represents a key strategy for rural community development.

Using a case study approach (described in Chapter 3), this study will investigate how the process of developing and sustaining school–community partnerships is integral to community development in five different Australian rural communities.

## **3. Methodology**

### **Research design**

A case study design using multi-site, multi-method techniques was considered most appropriate as the intention of this study was to investigate the multiplicity of ways in which rural schools contribute to their communities, and to investigate the complex relationship between leadership and school contribution to rural communities. Case studies allow in-depth investigation of inter-related factors and the processes that link and shape them (Stake 1995). This makes the case study method particularly suitable for this study of leadership processes in the context of school–community linkages and partnerships. Data were collected using three techniques: semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation. Each of these techniques is described later in the chapter.



A purposive (or judgment) sampling strategy (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias 1992; Burgess 1984) was used for site selection and interviewee selection because the large amount of resources required for the case study method means that researchers and funding bodies need some assurance that the sample will yield useful data. Sites were selected on the basis of information from expert sources who identified successful rural school–community partnerships known to them. Interviewee selection was informed by key informants in the sites (usually the Principal in consultation with other school staff such as the VET Coordinator). Site and interviewee selection details are provided later in this chapter.

### **Ensuring reliability and validity**

Reliability is determined by the extent to which the same data collection technique ‘applied repeatedly to the same object, would yield the same result each time’ (Babbie 1998, p. 129). Reliability can be influenced by a number of factors, including the ability of interviewees to answer the questions posed, interviewer bias, and coder differences in the data analysis process. The literature lists a number of techniques for ensuring reliability in qualitative research, including the test-retest method in which the same information is sought more than once from the same respondents; researcher checks, in which the researcher’s supervisor contacts a sample of respondents at random to verify data collected, and coder checks, in which several coders are asked to code the same work and then the results are compared and differences resolved (Babbie 1998).

Validity determines whether the research techniques used actually measure what they are intended to measure. There are five types of validity: predictive, concurrent, content, face and construct; the last is of particular relevance to researchers (Burns 2000). Construct validity relates to the theoretical constructs used to explain aspects of human behaviour, such as intelligence or sensitivity. There are a number of ways to test for construct validity of research instruments, including correlation of the ratings of ‘experts’ in the field as well as research subjects, regarding the meanings and measurement of the construct under study (Babbie 1998; Burns 2000).

To ensure validity and reliability of data and findings, a number of procedures were introduced into the research design: triangulation, involving the use of two or more methods of data collection; thick rich description to allow people to generalise to their own situation (Burns 2000); involvement of researchers in the field and extensive interviewing of a number of different people to provide supporting evidence (Miles & Huberman 1984; Patton 1990), and returning to the sites to present and gather comment on preliminary findings. The project Reference Group, made up of expert stakeholders in rural education and community development, were used to assist with construct validity. The project Reference Group members are listed in the Acknowledgments section of this report.

### **Site selection**

In September 1999, information letters outlining the purpose of the research and criteria for selection of potential study sites were forwarded to representatives of a number of key organisations, as well as to a number of individual stakeholders, in rural education and community development. The letters contained forms for nomination of study sites. Organisational representatives included Education Department District Superintendents (or equivalent) in each State/Territory with responsibility for rural education; Directors of Catholic Education Offices in rural Diocese in each State/Territory; Executive Officers of the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council Inc., Australian Secondary Principals Association, Australian Primary Principals Association, Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools of Australia, Australian Council of State School Organisations, and Australian Parents Council Inc.; and the President of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia. Individuals included the seven members of the project Reference Group, as well as other practitioners and researchers in the rural education and community development fields. A media

release detailing the aims of the project and criteria for selection of study sites, and seeking nominations of suitable study sites from community members, was also forwarded to rural newspapers in each State/Territory, and to the Editor of the newsletter of the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia. Copies of the nomination letter and media release are included in Appendix 1.

In order to be eligible for consideration, nominated sites needed to meet the following criteria:

- Community population of less than 10 000 people.
- The local school(s) must play an active and ongoing role in improving social and economic outcomes for the community. There needs to be demonstrated evidence of a close partnership between the school and one or more of the following local organisations: industry; large and small business; government, and community groups.
- The school(s) need(s) to be physically located within the community (for the purposes of this study, School of the Air and other forms of correspondence education or home schooling are excluded).

In addition, Indigenous communities in which the school(s) played an active role were encouraged to nominate.

Over 100 individual sites were nominated. Six of these sites were nominated more than once. Of the nominated sites, two were ineligible because their population exceeded the 10 000 limit, and one because it was a suburb of a city rather than a discrete rural community. Because of the large number of sites remaining, those individuals/organisations who had nominated more than one site were contacted by phone, and asked to rank their nominations according to the strength of the school–community partnership and the strength of school and community leadership within the site. The first-ranked site from each was included in the list of nominations, and the remainder was not considered. Information was collected for the remaining 44 sites, from both the nominator and the nominee (usually the Principal of the school being nominated). This information included details of rural and other industries; population size and background; measure of remoteness, number and type of schools; VET-in-schools program; stage of the school–community partnership, details of the partnership, and information about the nature and extent of school and community leadership.

A short list of 14 potential sites was then drawn up, consisting of sites from each State/Territory which displayed strong school–community partnerships and strong school and community leadership, including sites which provided examples of innovative school–community partnerships. Given that the funding body for this research is the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, each of the 14 sites short listed was selected because of their rural industry focus. The short list of sites was presented to the project Reference Group for discussion. From this shortlist, the research team recommended five sites and, following discussion with the Reference Group, these sites were endorsed as the sites in which the study would be undertaken. These sites were: Cooktown (Queensland), Cowell (South Australia), Margaret River (Western Australia), Meander (Tasmania) and Walla Walla (New South Wales). They were selected because they represented diversity in respect of the following final selection criteria:

- State/Territory;
- type of rural and other industry;
- degree of remoteness;
- population size and background (Indigenous, non-Indigenous);
- type of school(s)—primary only, primary and secondary, area, private and government school);
- gender of school/community leaders;

- existence and nature of VET-in-schools programs in at least two of the sites;
- stage of the school–community partnership, and
- partnership with different sectors of the community.

An additional selection criterion related to location, in that one of the sites had to be located within Tasmania. This was brought about by funding restrictions, and the need to reduce travel and accommodation costs where possible.

The characteristics of each site in terms of the selection criteria are displayed in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1: Site characteristics**

Site Name/State	Population	Industry (rural and other)	Degree of remoteness <sup>#</sup>	Type/number of school(s)
Cooktown, Queensland	3147≈ (approx. 30% Indigenous)	Cattle, grain, horticulture, mining, tourism, service centre	Very remote*	One state government area school (Pre-primary–Year 12)  Five state government feeder primary schools (Pre-primary–Year 7)
Cowell, South Australia	1241	Aquaculture, fishing, cereal, grains, fat lambs	Semi remote <sup>§</sup>	One state government area school only (Pre-primary–Year 12)
Margaret River, Western Australia	9953	Viticulture, dairying, tourism, service centre	Semi remote*	One state government senior high school (Years 8–12)  Seven feeder primary schools (four state government and three private) from Pre-primary–Year 7
Meander, Tasmania	258	Dairying, timber processing, tourism, arts and crafts	Not remote	One state government primary school (Pre-primary–Year 6)
Walla Walla, New South Wales	606	Grain, sheep, cattle, agricultural machinery and engineering works	Not remote	One private Lutheran boarding school (Years 7–12)  One state government primary school (Pre-primary–Year 6)

<sup>#</sup> Degree of remoteness is determined according to accessibility to 201 service centres across Australia, using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) developed by the Department of Health and Aged Care in collaboration with the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems (Bureau of Rural Sciences 1999, p. 113).

\* All the schools included in the Cooktown study, and two of the schools included in the Margaret River study, namely Augusta Primary and Karridale Primary, attract Commonwealth funding under the Country Areas Programme (CAP). This funding is administered by State Education Departments, and directed to schools which are classified as geographically isolated.

<sup>§</sup> The school in this site has elected to receive Partnerships 21 funding rather than CAP funding. Partnerships 21 is a South Australian model of local school management which includes additional funding for rural/remote schools.

<b>Gender of school/community leaders</b>	<b>VET-in-schools program</b>	<b>Stage of school–community partnership<sup>+</sup></b>	<b>Community sectors in partnership with school</b>
Male school Principal; female and male community leaders	Area school	Mid	Business, rural industry, mining, local government, Indigenous groups, parents/other individuals in community
Female school Principal; female and male community leaders	Area school	Mid–late	Business, aquaculture industry, local government, environmental groups, parents/other community members
Five male and three female school Principals; majority of community leaders male; key female business leader	Senior high school	Late	Business, viticulture industry, local government, TAFE, service clubs, churches, parents/other individuals in community
Male school Principal; female and male community leaders	Not applicable	Late	Environmental groups, arts and crafts groups, parents/other individuals in community
Male school Principals; female and male community leaders	Private Lutheran boarding school	Early	Rural industry, Lutheran Church, parents/other individuals in community, other organisations

+ Stage of development of the school–community partnership was determined by a combination of factors, including length of time the partnership had been in existence, extent and degree of involvement between the school and various community sectors, and demonstrated outcomes of the partnership.

## Interviewee selection

Using a purposive sampling strategy, four groups of interviewees were identified and, within each site, responses were deliberately sought from representatives of each of these four groups. The groups were:

- school staff (including Principals, teachers, teacher aides, administrative staff);
- youth (both at school as well as school leavers up to the age of 20);
- individual parents/community members with either informal (e.g. voluntary reading tutor, canteen helper) or formal (e.g. member of the Parent Association, School Council or equivalent bodies) school involvement, or both, and
- community members representing key community groups/organisations (e.g. service clubs, local businesses, local industry).

In addition, attempts were made to include approximately equal numbers of female and male respondents, plus respondents representing all age groups, extending from primary school aged children to retirees.

## Interviewees

In total, 227 individuals were interviewed for the project. The breakdown was as follows: Cooktown (42); Cowell (40); Margaret River (86); Meander (32) and Walla Walla (27). Some interviews were conducted individually whilst others were conducted as focus groups. It should be noted that in Cooktown a number of interviewees expressed their preference for being interviewed in pairs or groups rather than individually, and this is reflected in the following breakdown: Cooktown (23 people interviewed individually, 19 in groups); Cowell (24 people interviewed individually, 16 in groups); Margaret River (50 people interviewed individually, 36 in groups); Meander (24 people interviewed individually, 8 in groups), and Walla Walla (18 people interviewed individually, 9 in groups).

Of the total interviews conducted, one interview from Margaret River had to be withdrawn due to issues regarding informed consent, and one from Walla Walla was unable to be used due to technical problems with audio recording equipment. This left a total of 225 usable interviews.

Tables 2, 3 and 4 provide a breakdown of interviewees in each site by gender, age and interviewee type, respectively.

**TABLE 2: Interviewees in each site by gender**

Site	No. of females	No. of males	Total*
Cooktown	21	21	42
Cowell	18	22	40
Margaret River	44	41	85
Meander	21	11	32
Walla Walla	12	14	26
	<b>116</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>225</b>

\* Refers to usable interviews

**TABLE 3: Interviewees in each site by age**

Site	20 yrs or under	21–40 yrs	41–60 yrs#	Over 60 yrs	Total*
Cooktown	6	14	21	1	42
Cowell	6	11	21	2	40
Margaret River	22	27	32	4	85
Meander	4	4	21	3	32
Walla Walla	7	5	14	0	26
	<b>45</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>225</b>

\* Refers to usable interviews

# The predominance of interviewees in this age group is most likely explained by the relatively large proportion of school staff and business/industry representatives from this age group in leadership positions responsible for the development of school–community linkages.

**TABLE 4: Interviewees in each site by interviewee type**

Site	School staff	Youth	Parents/community members	Community group representatives	Total*
Cooktown	13	6	8	15	42
Cowell	9	6	12	13	40
Margaret River	24	22	23	16	85
Meander	9	4	13	6	32
Walla Walla	8	7	6	5	26
	<b>63</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>225</b>

\* Refers to usable interviews

Note that although a number of interviewees had multiple roles within the school and/or community, the above table records only the main role (i.e. the primary reason for selecting each interviewee).

## Data collection

### Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate, in order to elicit extensive and richer data in relation to the subject of the research, while giving a direction to the interview (Burns 2000). To correspond with the four target groups of interviewees, four interview schedules were devised: Interview Schedule 1 School Staff; Interview Schedule 2 Youth; Interview Schedule 3 Parent/Community Member, and Interview Schedule 4 Organisation Representative. Each interview schedule contained a similar set of core questions, including background questions regarding the community and the school, information about changes in the school and community and the way in which they came about, and a set of questions about the individual interviewee and his/her participation in school and community activities. The remainder of the questions asked about the nature, extent and outcomes of school–community linkages, and in each interview schedule were framed slightly differently to reflect the interests of the four target interviewee groups. Each schedule contained approximately nine questions, although Interview Schedule 1 was slightly longer with 11 questions.

### *Trialling of interview schedules*

Prior to the commencement of data collection, the schedules were trialled in March 2000 with a small group of volunteers from within the University (including parents and former school teachers), as well as with a small group of students from a local primary school. Comments on the design of the

schedules were also received from members of the project Reference Group. Following trialling, it was found that the schedules were too long to be completed in the suggested 45 minutes, and that the wording of several questions was either ambiguous or unclear. In addition, it was noted that Interview Schedule 1 for School Staff contained at least one question asking educators to comment on matters outside their professional expertise. The four Interview Schedules were subsequently reduced in length, by combining questions with a similar or related theme; by deleting questions or parts of questions that did not relate directly to one of the six research questions for the study; and by deleting those questions in Interview Schedule 1 that asked educators to comment on matters outside their professional expertise. In addition, the wording of questions was revised, to ensure clarity of meaning. An additional question was included in Interview Schedule 2 that focused directly on school leavers. Copies of all four interview schedules are provided in Appendix 2.

### ***Participant information and consent***

In accordance with University Ethics Committee guidelines, prior to each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the interview, and issues of confidentiality were discussed. Participants were provided with an Information Sheet and a Statement of Informed Consent which they were asked to sign before the interview commenced. A separate Statement of Informed Consent was provided for school Principals. For youth under 18 years of age, a Parental Consent form was forwarded by the school to the parent/guardian of each participating student. Interviews with students were only conducted once signed Parental Consent forms had been returned. At the completion of the interview, participants were invited to complete a Further Contact form, so they could be mailed details regarding community meetings at which preliminary findings from the study were presented. Copies of the Information Sheet, Informed Consent (for Principals, and for all other interviewees), Parental Consent, and Further Contact forms are contained in Appendix 3.

### **Perception of community**

In order to gain an understanding of the extent of each community, each respondent was asked to indicate the boundaries of his/her community on a map. Most, but not all, respondents did this. A number of respondents also described community boundaries at the beginning of the interview.

### **Written documentation**

At each site, copies of school magazines, newsletters, written policies and any other relevant and available documents were collected. This included material from community newspapers and other sources as well as school-sourced documents. This material was used to check the consistency of different data sources, a technique known as triangulation that improves the internal validity of the data (Burns 2000).

### **Observation**

Observation was used to collect additional data, further strengthening the triangulation process. Members of the research team were in each of the schools and communities for approximately one week. During this time, they observed and documented a range of activities and interactions such as interactions in the staffroom and in classrooms, staff meetings, meetings of parent bodies, school councils and management committees, and VET work placements.

## **Data analysis**

### **Interview data**

All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. A selection of transcribed interviews from each site was provided to each project team member for preliminary identification of key themes. Following preliminary analysis on an individual basis, the project team developed a framework for data analysis over the course of two project team meetings and through individual consultation. The framework was derived from key themes identified in the data, in conjunction with themes identified in the literature. The framework for analysing school contributions to rural communities was informed by Miller's (1995) categorisation. Consistent with the project team's conception of



leadership as a process synonymous with the community development process, Lane and Dorfman's (1997) documentation of the collaborative community development process, together with Falk and Smith's (forthcoming) model of leadership intervention, provided an overarching framework to inform analysis of leadership issues. In addition, functional aspects of leadership were informed, in part, by conceptual and operational definitions of the six-factor model for leaders (Silins, Mulford & Zarins 1999) and by the Tasmanian Principal Competency Profile (Department of Education 1999). The framework was then crosschecked against themes identified in the research questions.

Two project team members manually coded all interviews. To ensure consistency in interview coding, coders crosschecked with each other on a regular basis, discussing areas of ambiguity and assigning and making necessary modifications to the coding framework. A copy of the final coding framework is provided in Appendix 4. Interview transcripts and their codes were then imported into the NUD\*IST (Non-Numeric Unstructured Data Information Searching and Theorising) computer software program for qualitative data analysis. Written documents and observation notes collected in the sites were also coded and entered into NUD\*IST as off-line documents. All data were then analysed by site, with the aid of NUD\*IST.

### **Analysing perceptions of community**

The completed maps from each study site indicate that respondents can be classified into three major groupings, according to their perception of community. The three views of community were local, extended, and regional. Table 5 presents individuals' perceptions of community, by study site.

**TABLE 5: Individuals' perceptions of community by site**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Local community perception</b>	<b>Extended community perception</b>	<b>Regional community perception</b>	<b>Total*</b>
Cooktown	12	10	10	<b>32</b>
Cowell	24	4	2	<b>30</b>
Margaret River	26	40	9	<b>75</b>
Meander	6	6	8	<b>20</b>
Walla Walla	3	15	4	<b>22<sup>§</sup></b>

\* Not all individuals interviewed in each site provided details of their perception of community. For this reason, these numbers differ slightly from the total number of interviewees per site.

§ An additional respondent conceived of community as extending outside regional boundaries to include other regions of NSW, other States of Australia, and several overseas countries. This reflects the wide drawing area of St Paul's boarding school. As this was the perception of one individual only, an additional category was not warranted.

*Local community* was defined by the researchers as including the immediate location of the interviewee, and surrounding areas within an approximate 20 km radius.

The *extended community* view was defined by the researchers to include the immediate location of the interviewee, plus one or more neighbouring communities in a similar geographical area, which have regular contact and interaction. In some cases (e.g. Cowell), extended community was represented by those communities engaged in a formal or informal school cluster arrangement. In others, the extended community was determined to be similar to the local government boundaries (e.g. in Margaret River).

A *regional community* view was defined as including the area encompassed by the extended community, as well as one or more communities further afield but still within the same geographical region. In most cases, the regional community included at least one regional population centre with a population of 2000 or more. In some cases, the regional perception of community was represented by

the corresponding local government area (e.g. the Meander Valley local government area). In other cases, the regional community was represented by a combination of two local government areas with similar or complementary sources of economic activity (e.g. the Augusta-Margaret River and Busselton Shire Councils together comprise the South-West region of Western Australia in which Margaret River is located, and represent the regional community indicated by some respondents).

As Table 5 illustrates, in some sites, there is a relatively even spread of local, extended and regional perceptions of community. This is not surprising, given that the researchers used a purposive sampling strategy to select respondents. This strategy included selecting representatives of local, regional and state organisations and interest groups.

In other sites, there is a marked difference in perceptions of community. For example, an overwhelming majority of respondents in Cowell viewed their community in local terms, as consisting of the township itself and immediate surrounds, but not including other neighbouring communities such as Cleve and Kimba. This somewhat inward-looking perception is surprising, given that Cowell is part of a formal cluster arrangement for both education and health services, and given the regional focus on education and training represented by the Eyre Peninsula Regional Strategy. However, the data clearly indicate that Cowell is at present undergoing change, from a largely inward community focus to an outward focus (see the Cowell case study presented in Chapter 5). In a community as small as Walla Walla, where services and resources are limited, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents favour an extended community perception, including the other small communities which comprise the Culcairn Shire, as well as the nearby larger centre of Albury. As well, the school has daily school bus runs to these locations. Margaret River respondents favour an extended community perception, which is consistent with the Margaret River township being the largest of the communities within the area and therefore the base for many resources and services. Given the proactive and forward-looking nature of the Margaret River community (see the Margaret River case study presented in Chapter 6), the relatively low percentage of respondents with a regional community perspective is, however, somewhat unexpected.

## **Community meetings and development of final report**

Once drafts of the five site case studies were written, the project team developed some preliminary findings for the whole study. Following comment from the project Reference Group, these preliminary findings were taken to community meetings in each of the five study sites. A copy of the preliminary findings is provided in Appendix 5. All interviewees were invited to attend the meetings, which were attended by between one quarter and one third of the respondents in most sites.

The community meetings provided valuable feedback to the project team on the validity of the findings and suggested some recommendations to be included in the final report. Copies of a sample invitation to the community meeting in Margaret River, together with a summary of issues and recommendations from each of the community meetings, are provided in Appendix 6.

The discussion and recommendations chapters (Chapters 9 and 10) draw on this community feedback and input as well as on the project data and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The draft final report was sent to members of the project Reference Group and their comments have been incorporated into the final report.

## 4. Cooktown: Pushing the boundaries

This is a case study of a Vocational Education and Training (VET)-in-schools program as a vehicle for a school's contribution to its community. In particular it is a story of a remote school and community prepared to push the boundaries, and think 'outside the box' in order to develop creative solutions to their particular community needs. Cooktown and the surrounding region is not the sort of community to take things 'lying down'. When the Sydney Olympic Games torch relay bypassed the town, they held their own torch relay under the banner of NOCOG (Not the Organising Committee for the Olympic Games) as a fundraiser for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. When faced with high youth unemployment and low school retention rates, school and community developed their own VET-in-schools program. From the beginning they made it clear that the program would be developed and run on their own terms to meet their own particular needs. It meant pushing policy boundaries that precluded funding to Years 9 and 10 VET-in-schools programs; pushing traditional education boundaries such as the 9.00am to 3.00pm school day, the school precinct and existing curricula; challenging educational practices such as employing only trained educators as VET coordinators; and challenging established business practices of providing employment opportunities only to young people whose families were 'known' in the community.

### The site

This case study centres on the most remote and isolated of the five study sites, Cooktown, in Far North Queensland. However, with the gradual sealing of the road between Cairns and Cooktown, and the increase in communication infrastructure, the sense of physical and psychological isolation is gradually decreasing. With its population of 1411 people at the 1996 Census (ABS 1998) and now estimated at 1800 (Hans Lucer, pers. comm. 25 September 2001), Cooktown is a service centre for the nearby Indigenous community of Hope Vale (population 777 (ABS 1998)), as well as for the surrounding pastoral properties, and for the smaller communities of Rossville, Laura and Lakeland, and the Wujal Wujal Indigenous community. For the purposes of this study, the Cooktown community is deemed to include all of these communities, representing a total estimated population of 3147 (Hans Lucer, pers. comm. 25 September 2001). Of these communities, Cooktown has a close relationship with Hope Vale, mainly because of its proximity to Cooktown and because Hope Vale State School (for primary children) is the main feeder school outside Cooktown to the Secondary Department of Cooktown State School.

Cooktown is the seat of the local Cook Shire Council, which services the entire Cape York region, excluding Weipa. A community member described it as a 'continually changing community ... [and] centre for a number of government agencies'. Following Shire Council bankruptcy, local government had been under a period of administration for some forty years until 1989, when Shire Council elections were again held and a Chairman (later known as Mayor) and councillors elected. One third of the Shire's total population of 6880 is identified as Indigenous (ABS 1998), and there appears to be a relatively good relationship between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, especially between the school and the Indigenous community. As one member of the Indigenous community told us, 'Cooktown school has done a lot for the Indigenous people, Indigenous kids, and I'm pretty proud of Cooktown School ... they go out of their way to help us ... '.

A number of respondents identified problems in the community with the following being representative: 'There are a lot of problems in Cooktown with alcohol, drug abuse, which all lead to domestic violence and stuff'. Despite such problems there was also a common view that 'it's a community that's coming out of a very depressed state'.

The region supports a number of industries, including rural industry (large cattle and grain holdings, as well as smaller horticultural concerns), mining at a nearby silica mine, and an increasing tourism industry. Unemployment in the region at the 1996 Census was 8.4% (ABS 1998). In an effort to remedy unemployment and to develop a training culture within the region, several community initiatives have been developed in recent years, including a VET-in-schools program introduced in 1997 and extended later to include school-based apprenticeships, and a local workforce development partnership program introduced in 1998 to raise the profile of education and training and to improve and create employment and training opportunities within the community. At the time of writing this case study, plans are underway for the development of a community-run skills training centre within Cooktown, which will be responsible for identifying and providing relevant training opportunities throughout the region.

## The school

There is one school in Cooktown, the Cooktown State School and Secondary Department, which caters for 420 students from Pre-school to Year 12. Originally a primary school only, in 1986 a separate secondary campus for students up to Year 10 was established, then in the early 1990s the secondary campus extended its offerings to Years 11 and 12 students. In 1998, the two campuses were amalgamated into a single campus in new purpose-built accommodation several blocks from the town centre. Approximately 25 to 30 per cent of the students are Indigenous, with a larger percentage in the Secondary Department.

A feature of the Cooktown State School is the way it actively fosters partnerships with the community. The school is involved in collaborative community development initiatives funded through a variety of State Government and Federal Government programs such as Priority Country Area Program (PCAP) and Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA). For example, Cooktown State School has developed links with schools in the five smaller communities in the region. As the Cook cluster, these schools have combined their funding from various sources, including PCAP, ASSPA and the schools' Parents and Citizens (P & C) organisations, and have developed and run a number of workshops and other programs for the benefit of students, parents and the wider community. In May 2000, Cooktown State School was the venue for the Rural Futures Conference, hosted by the Department of Primary Industries Queensland, and PCAP, which attracted a number of intrastate and interstate delegates. The Conference was preceded by the inaugural student leadership forum, convened by Cooktown State School, for high school student leaders from throughout Far North Queensland. A key outcome of each of these activities was the fostering of greater cooperation between the different communities and their schools. The PCAP program, in particular, which is run by a committee of community and school representatives, is described as having played a major role in facilitating interaction and building trust between schools and their communities, and also in fostering greater cooperation between community groups within Cooktown itself. As one respondent explains, 'the main [outcome of PCAP] is ... the networks that are formed'.

The school has received particular recognition in recent years for its *Step Ahead* program. *Step Ahead* is an alternative, community-based VET-in-schools program for students at risk of not completing secondary school. It is needs driven and therefore culturally inclusive, although of the 22 students enrolled in the program in 2000, from Years 9 to 11, the majority were Indigenous males. It offers Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Level 1 training to students, with competencies being recorded in student log books. Training areas reflect the industry base of the region, and include rural skills, building and construction, engineering (pre-vocational), basic office skills, and hospitality. The program comprises one week's work placement, and three weeks of school, every month. The school component consists of a modified curriculum which 'is delivered in a multi-age class situation focusing on numeracy, literacy and life skills' (*Step Ahead: A Cooktown community initiative* booklet, p. 17). Students also select a number of electives from the mainstream curriculum. It is this program and its outcomes for youth, the community, and the region, that forms the basis of the case study presented here.

## **Step Ahead: A community initiative**

The establishment of *Step Ahead* can best be described under three phases: initiation, maintenance and progression.

### **Initiation**

The seed for the *Step Ahead* program was sown in 1996 during discussions between two Cooktown State School teachers; one a teacher of manual arts and the other a learning support teacher. One was concerned with promoting vocational options more within the school; the other with implementing a program to cater for children whose needs were not being met by the mainstream curriculum and whose attendance was irregular. Not only did these two teachers have differing views of the needs but they were also often involved in what could be termed 'constructive conflict'. As one school staff member put it:

I think our success came from the fact that [one of them] was at one end of the spectrum [as an educator] and [the other one] was at the other [as a hands-on, let's go and do it person] ... [they] argued and bitched and carried on ...

The Principal of the time assisted and supported these two enthusiastic, but conceptually different teachers, to develop a solution to their concerns by acting as a sounding board and by seeking information from relevant key people external to the community, including a representative from Education Queensland. The tentative solution derived by the two teachers was to devise a VET-in-schools program that would cater for students at risk. Utilising their own relatively extensive community networks, and acting on their advice to us that if you want to get things done in the Cooktown community you 'do it yourself', the two teachers set out on a course of action that not only sought advice and information from, but also increasingly involved, the community. Again, the Principal assisted and supported them by utilising his own extensive community networks. The following school staff member explains why it was so important to involve the community from an early stage:

... have an understanding that there are a lot of people in the community who have an interest in what the school is doing and ... to cultivate that interest ... the school really needs to be able to build the links between ... the councils and the different interest groups ... so that you've got a network of contacts ... and then really working with those different groups to find out how you can best provide for the students as well as look at what happens outside of school ...

From the early 1990s in Cooktown, there had been a gradual increase in the extent of school–community linkages, in part due to the PCAP program, through which school and community were encouraged to work together to develop and implement initiatives to benefit students and the wider community. These existing linkages provided a solid foundation on which to build *Step Ahead*.

Following discussions with a senior consultant from Education Queensland, details regarding a proposed VET program were developed. Because of the huge amount of work involved in sourcing funding and setting up a program of this kind, funding was sought and obtained to allow both teachers to reduce their teaching loads by half, for a six-month period. During this time they coordinated submissions for funding, organised meetings and began to build a community support base, all the while maintaining a bridging link between school and community.

The next step was to approach prominent community members to participate in a 'think tank' regarding the viability of a school VET program and to gauge public support for such an initiative. The key was personal communication. A former school staff member involved in the initiation of *Step Ahead* recalls:

R: ... that's when we sort of targeted various key players like after that many years in a small community and I knew everybody and I could tap people on the shoulder and get them involved and they felt obligated to do so. So ...

I: So it was a lot of personal sort of communication?

R: Very personal, very much yeah, and I worked really closely with the mayor and the councillors and I was on a lot of various committees you know and as things happen in small communities when you need something you need to just go around and make a phone call, visit people and you know they jump on board and they feel well they have to because you know if they don't nobody else will. And ... the Cooktown people are extremely vigorous and passionate about their town, extremely so and I've never seen anything like it.

Several key community opinion leaders were actively involved in shaping the vision of the VET program, including a representative from the mining industry, who proposed to include students from Years 9 and 10 in the program. It was considered that traditional VET programs, which began at Year 11, were too late as many students had already dropped out of school by this stage. The proposed initiative received overwhelming support from school and community members. It was then presented to the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation<sup>1</sup> (ASTF), the key funding body. ASTF funding and support was to be a major factor in the initiation and maintenance of *Step Ahead*, as it provided a salary for the specialist classroom teacher employed to deliver a modified curriculum to students. The Principal and initiating teachers worked closely with key individuals from ASTF, and from the Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) and Education Queensland, who also would provide support. ASTF policy at the time precluded funding for VET-in-schools programs for Year 9 and Year 10 students, however, because of the level of school and community commitment to the initiative, and the foresight of the funding body, the initiative went ahead:

... the lady [from ASTF] ... said well this doesn't really quite fit the guidelines precisely, but it's such a valuable initiative we need to keep it going ... So a lot of support was provided by [ASTF], they were just brilliant ... fortunately they had people who could think outside the square and you know support us and allow us to take the risks and the risks paid off.

Subsequently, ASTF policy was changed to provide funding for VET-in-schools programs in Years 9 and 10. A school staff member involved in the initiation of *Step Ahead* explains:

I: ... you said that the funding from ASTF was going to be a problem ... how did you resolve, was it something that the committee worked on to get around?

R: No, they changed the policy.

I: So it was very timely was it?

R: No actually, we were the catalysts ... now they've changed their policies to fund projects from Year 9 on.

The next step in developing the program was to formalise the school–community partnership by the formation of a Management Committee, comprising school staff and targeted community members, who represented the various community sectors that were stakeholders in the program. Many of these committee members also were present at the original community 'think tank', and included representatives from the local council, the construction, mining, pastoral and hospitality industries, Indigenous groups, as well as parents. A representative of the hospitality/tourism industry, with extensive links within the business and local government sectors of Cooktown, was approached by the Principal to act as chairperson of the newly formed Management Committee. A good deal of the initial and ongoing success of the *Step Ahead* program has been attributed to the Management Committee who were 'a very very powerful group of quite energetic and creative people'. In particular, the strong support of key players from the Indigenous communities in Cooktown and nearby Hope Vale, as well as a key player from the silica mining industry, was noted as important to the successful setting up and operation of the *Step Ahead* program.

The formation and early actions of the Management Committee were significant for several reasons. The Management Committee:

- reflected the community-based nature of the program;

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<sup>1</sup> Now known as the Enterprise & Career Education Foundation (ECEP).

- developed the program as a business, by developing a business plan, an induction program for participating workplaces, assessment and quality assurance processes, and by publicising the program through brochures and presentations at conferences and seminars;
- provided a strong ‘customer’ focus by facilitating ‘on-going liaison between stakeholders and clients to obtain relevant feedback for guiding the development of the program’ (*Step Ahead: A Cooktown community initiative* booklet, p. 12), and
- brought ‘a sense of direction and a networking structure to the project’ (*Step Ahead: A Cooktown community initiative* booklet, p. 10).

The role of Management Committee members at this stage was to involve themselves in decision making regarding policy development, and to canvas other employers within their industry to offer work placements to students. To reinforce community ownership of the program, a conscious decision was made by the Management Committee to hold committee meetings and other functions related to the program at venues in the community, rather than at the school. In addition, it was considered important to hold meetings regularly and on time, to send out minutes and reminders of meetings, and to follow up non-attendance of Committee members. This businesslike approach from the program’s inception helped to give *Step Ahead* credibility within the community, as one of the teachers involved in initiating the program recalls:

I: So initially what was the purpose of these meetings? You were having them regularly, what were you hoping to achieve?

R: We wanted the whole program to be seen as a partnership between the community and the school ... we wanted it to be an integral part of the substance of it, the development of it and so on, and people tended to take that on board, they tended to work with us.

Nor were those involved with the initiative above a little ‘bribery’, at least at the beginning. The same staff member recalls:

Initially we also brought a light lunch for everyone to get them to come along, but they did. And later on we just dispensed with the light lunches, it got too expensive, and everyone kept on coming.

The care and time taken with the screening and selection of employers and students was seen as a key feature contributing to the success of the program. As the VET Coordinator stressed:

... it took us 12 months before we even looked at a student in the school ... We made sure we did our ground work, our homework with the employers ...

For over six months in the lead-up to the first intake of students, potential employers were carefully selected by Management Committee members according to their suitability and commitment to the aims of the program, and according to their involvement in actual or potential employment areas. One committee member explains:

I suppose we looked at how long they’d been in business in Cooktown, looked at how well we knew them personally as well as ... in the social way ... we really knew the people’s background, we knew that if they made a commitment we were happy that the commitment would be fulfilled  
...

For students:

Inclusion in the program was conditional upon:

1. Interview with a guidance officer.
2. Evaluation of academic progress.
3. Signing of a contract outlining minimum expectations.
4. Parental interview and written consent (*Step Ahead: A Cooktown community initiative* booklet, p. 13).

As the following *Step Ahead* school staff point out, for students to enter the program there had to be a need and they also had to believe it was a privilege to belong:

They can't just go into *Step Ahead* because they want to. There has to be the need and the need normally is that their literacy, numeracy is very low and quite often their self-confidence and self-esteem is also very low.

We thought it might look like a dummy's course, and we didn't want it to be that way ... when we selected the students ... we said to them well if you don't come to school, or you don't go to your job, you're sacked ... And, of course, they ... tried us out, some of them got sacked ... they went back to normal classes ... We tried to promote it as a privilege to be there.

In January 1997, the first cohort of students began the *Step Ahead* program.

## Maintenance

Following the implementation of *Step Ahead*, the role of some of the key players in the program changed. The Principal's active involvement in the program reduced; whilst he still provided support for the program, his role in the day-to-day running decreased. The Management Committee's role changed from one of initiating, to one of monitoring and refining the program. The Committee maintains ongoing links and regular communication between employers, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community, and the school. It continues to meet once a month at the RSL in town, and is actively involved in decision making regarding student work placements and other issues affecting the program. It also advises on current industry trends and training needs.

In order to ensure the continuation of *Step Ahead*, and in recognition of the large amount of administration and coordination required to maintain such a program, the position of *Step Ahead* and School-based Apprenticeship Coordinator was created. The chairperson of the Management Committee was an invited applicant, and was successful in her application. She had lived in the community for a number of years and, prior to her appointment, was a small business operator. The following extracts describe the 'risk' taken by the school by appointing someone without teaching qualifications, and the reasons for making this decision in terms of potential benefits for both school and community. The first extract is from a community member and the second from a school staff member:

One of the risks the school took was taking somebody who doesn't have an education background to tackle an issue like this ... she doesn't know that if you're teaching, don't go and get the kids out and take them to the plane at 6 o'clock in the morning ... *Step Ahead* ... needed someone who could bridge the gap between the school and an employer ... that position could have been given to a teacher, or someone out of their own system and I don't think it would ever have had half its success ...

[The *Step Ahead* Coordinator] is the type of person who has a lot of energy, she's very community minded and can see out to the peripherals to see how if we do this then that will affect that and may acquire an advantage to the town in a number of other different ways. She's definitely a person who knows how to work through the bureaucracy of government and government departments ... she has a very broad network ... she's the type of person that really helps initiate and get things going.

The *Step Ahead* Coordinator used her broad networks in business and local government to facilitate communication between the school and community. As she noted:



If there is a problem that problem is coped with very early and it doesn't get time to fester or to really grow out of all proportion.

This same person did much to strengthen the relationship between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities; in particular, she worked hard at establishing a close relationship with the Indigenous Hope Vale Council, which has proved important in ensuring the *Step Ahead* program is well supported in that community.

The following comment from a student is typical of the level of support of past and present *Step Ahead* students for the Coordinator:

She always checks up on us, always makes sure we're up to date on our subjects and stuff, and she's always happy to help us in any way, [even] if we're in trouble ... she's always willing to be there for us.

Also important for the program's success was using a primary rather than secondary school approach by having one teacher responsible for and teaching the *Step Ahead* students rather than a range of subject teachers. As one of the students in the program told us:

... one classroom teacher is good ... the teacher gets to know us well and [I] wasn't so ashamed ... if you have a problem with maths ... she was willing to help us.

A number of respondents commented on the high level of commitment of stakeholders in the program. This commitment extends well beyond what might normally be expected. Speaking of the *Step Ahead* Coordinator, the following community member explains:

The reason that *Step Ahead* has succeeded and is not just because it's somebody's job ... [it's] people's personal interest in addressing those imbalances or doing something for those that are obviously missing out or dropping out or being passed by the way, so [the *Step Ahead* Coordinator] is employed by the school ... but if it was just 9 to 3 well the program wouldn't have achieved what it has achieved ...

Continued high levels of commitment are demonstrated by the employers participating in *Step Ahead*, as the VET Coordinator notes:

... I'm happy to say that the commitment is still there with the same people that we started with four years ago.

Although the Management Committee would normally cover expenses relating to work placements, respondents noted the amount of financial support provided by employers, in terms of providing students on work placement with meals, accommodation and transport as required. In addition, the commitment of Management Committee members in terms of time and financial contributions was seen also as an important factor in the program's success. The VET Coordinator explains:

We've kept it a really good close committee because they all give two hours of their time one morning every month which says a lot for a small community when there is travel involved ... you've got the guys fly down from [the silica mine] for that meeting and the other people come in from various [places].

A former school staff member involved in initiating *Step Ahead* noted that this continued commitment of stakeholders to the program is influenced strongly by the program's positive outcomes for youth:

... and the kids we have, I think we're very lucky ... they turned out to be really good, excellent kids. And they impressed all the employers, and to a degree that everyone wanted to be part of it ... so I think that's what kept it going actually, more than anything we did, I think it was the kids, because they showed so much interest, and they changed so dramatically ...

## Progression

Following on from the success of the *Step Ahead* program, the Cooktown State School has developed a school-based apprenticeship program in recent years. In 2000, there were 12 senior students undertaking school-based apprenticeships; some of these were from *Step Ahead*, with the majority from the mainstream educational program. Three quarters of these school-based apprentices were employed in the silica mining industry. The *Step Ahead* Management Committee also assumes responsibility for school-based apprenticeships.

The successful implementation of the *Step Ahead* program has been the catalyst for other community initiatives in terms of education and training, including a planned community-run skills training centre in Cooktown. The skills centre planning committee comprises community and school representatives, including the Principal and *Step Ahead* Coordinator. Negotiations are currently underway regarding sharing of school facilities and infrastructure with the proposed skills centre.

The *Step Ahead* program is subject to regular review by the Management Committee. Most community groups and industry sectors now participate in *Step Ahead*, and new opportunities in tourism and ecotourism are being sought. However, it was noted that the links between the school and the public health sector appear to be underdeveloped due to a variety of factors, including issues of confidentiality which prevents the health sector from offering its services as a host employer in the *Step Ahead* program. Issues to be addressed in the future include further developments that will benefit youth in the wider Cape York region, the need to attract and retain female students to the program and to have work placements for them beyond the supermarket and child care, and the need to resolve timetabling and sustainability issues (*Step Ahead: A Cooktown community initiative* booklet, p. 22).

Timetabling issues include disruptions associated with *Step Ahead* students regularly missing elective classes which are offered as part of the mainstream school timetable, while on work placement. Sustainability issues relate mainly to the need for ongoing and increased levels of funding, following the initial three-year seeding grant. In 1999, it was noted that:

Current community support exceeds the school's capacity to accommodate all identified students in the program. The school in consultation with the community needs to encourage Education Queensland to increase its support so that the dimensions of the program can be expand [sic] (*Step Ahead: A Cooktown community initiative* booklet, p. 23).

Respondents interviewed in 2000 indicated the level of community support for the program was still high, and noted some progress with regard to funding issues. They referred in particular to Education Queensland's inclusion of funding for the position of a *Step Ahead* classroom teacher in the school's ongoing staffing profile, and noted the importance of this increased financial support to the future of *Step Ahead*.

## How does *Step Ahead* contribute to the community?

The data indicate that there are multiple beneficiaries of the *Step Ahead* program: the youth who participate, the school, individual community members and groups, and the region. As a result of participating in the program, there has been an observed increase in the self-esteem and self-worth of youth, in positive behaviour, and in school retention levels. Some have gone on to participate in school-based apprenticeships, and for others, there is a real chance of obtaining work within the region once they have left school. More importantly, those young people who have completed the *Step Ahead* program have gained a sense of their place in and value to the community, and have become positive role models to other young people. As a number of Indigenous respondents note:

[One *Step Ahead* student] won the CD for attendance, that was the first thing he told me, within two minutes of meeting him. And that was from missing school all the time to having the best attendance ... it's another kettle of fish, you know he's there all the time when you need him.

... it's been good for both non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous kids ... it's good that the students themselves know too that there are people in the community that care for them.

My young fella, he's really slow at picking up, and he's joined the *Step Ahead* program, and he loves it and he's always encouraging the other kids now, always says don't miss school or they'll kick you out of *Step Ahead* ... so he's really encouraging the other kids to attend school ...

On a broader level, community capacity has increased as school and community members work together to provide opportunities for their youth. The development of the *Step Ahead* program has provided a mechanism for people with similar values and beliefs to work together to bring about change in the community, as the following Shire Council representative explains:

It's [*Step Ahead*] certainly a catalyst ... it brought [together] as a committee, a group of people with similar interests and ideas and ambitions, I suppose, and that gave that base then to look at other [community initiatives] ... the conversation will lead itself to different opportunities and ideas and options ...

Trust between individuals and between different groups (youth and adults, Indigenous and non-Indigenous) has grown through involvement in the *Step Ahead* program. Two Indigenous respondents comment:

Lots of aboriginal people just don't [support their kids] ... But through *Step Ahead* there's been family support ... it's amazing when Christmas comes around when we can see that parents come, even younger brothers and sisters, that come to the speech night ... it's brought the people out of the woodwork.

... to see black and white mingle together that night [at the annual presentation night for *Step Ahead* students] was a hair raising thing.

The program has given the community a greater sense of control over its own and its children's futures, and has fostered an increasing awareness of the need for education and training. This Indigenous respondent explains:

I think that with RATEP [Remote Area Teacher Education Program] and that *Step Ahead* and there's more people getting more jobs yeah, there's more people in you know good positions and working for the community ... to see different people you know, different aboriginal people and in different areas of where they've got control over things and it makes me proud.

Participation in *Step Ahead* is stimulating a greater awareness of the need for individuals within industry groups to work together. A rural industry representative describes the benefits of participation in *Step Ahead* in the following way:

... from the properties' point of view and from the industry's perspective point of view it's the benefit that you are going to get long term, on bringing that kid along in that right direction. That you may not get the full benefits out of it but your industry is going to. And I think more people have got to look in that direction ...

The *Step Ahead* program has received widespread publicity because of its positive impact on the community. For example, a video and booklet about the program were produced by Education Queensland, and distributed widely throughout Queensland. A school staff member describes how this publicity has increased school and community identity and pride, and has engendered a sense of collective self-efficacy:

Oh the enormous personal and professional pride for being associated with it, the fact that it was recognised by a national organisation like ASTF, gave enormous sort of kudos to the people involved and ... they felt good about themselves. So self-esteem of everybody increased, it was a winner and everybody ... wants to be part of the winning team ...

## Discussion

### Nature and extent of the school's contribution to the community

Cooktown State School plays an important leadership role in the community. Through the expertise, enthusiasm and commitment of its Principal and staff, their access to extensive external networks of

information and support, and determination to work with their community, the school has contributed much to the region in terms of increasing community capacity. It has gone some way towards addressing youth issues such as high unemployment, low school retention rates, and low self-esteem; it has done much to build trust and strengthen relationships between the different community groups; it has provided a mechanism for community dialogue and action, and it has increased community awareness of the need for increased levels of formal education and training, and the benefits of working collectively in order to ensure the sustainability of the region. School staff involved in *Step Ahead* expressed some concerns, however, at the relatively narrow range of criteria used by funding bodies to evaluate the program's effectiveness, which did not take into account the multiple outcomes for youth and the community noted above.

Although *Step Ahead* was a school initiative it soon grew to become a community vision reflecting a partnership between the school and a community of committed and passionate individuals. There have been several new developments in the community as a result of *Step Ahead*, including a school-based apprenticeship program and a local workforce development partnership. Underpinning the partnership is a group of school and community leaders who facilitate thinking outside the box, risk taking and relationship building, and a leadership process intent on finding community solutions to community problems.

### **Leadership issues: Key players and their roles**

That the initial proposal for *Step Ahead* came from two teachers at the school illustrates a key feature of the Principal's leadership role—of developing people and facilitating them to follow through with their ideas. This transformational leadership style provided the impetus for the school and community to risk take and push boundaries in the development of a program which would address community concerns regarding youth.

The courage to take this first step came, in part, from the thorough knowledge that the Principal and teachers had of their community—its strengths and weaknesses, its needs and aspirations—and from demonstrated community support for such an initiative. The program draws heavily on existing community assets, namely the people and their willingness to participate for the good of the community's youth. A significant feature of *Step Ahead* was the decision by the Principal and initiating teachers to involve the community from the beginning, to encourage their support for, and ownership of, *Step Ahead*. This demonstrates the importance placed by school leaders on broad-based involvement in leadership. However, some concern was expressed by a small number of teachers not directly involved in *Step Ahead*, that more could have been done to build a support base for the initiative within the school. These teachers, who felt excluded from the process, described feelings of resentment at the amount of publicity and resources being received by staff who were involved in *Step Ahead*.

The Principal and initiating teachers built an initial community support base, by using their existing contacts with key community members. These key community members formed the nucleus of the *Step Ahead* Management Committee that took control and ownership of and, most importantly, responsibility for the program. The Management Committee was pivotal to the maintenance, and continues to be pivotal to the progression, of *Step Ahead*. It is a key link between school and community, and is a good example of school and community leaders developing a shared vision and working collaboratively for the benefit of the community. By distributing leadership, all stakeholders have been given an equal voice in the initiation, maintenance and progression of *Step Ahead*. The conscious decision of the Committee to hold Management Committee meetings in the community rather than the school, and to adopt business principles in the management of the program, increased the credibility and sense of community ownership of *Step Ahead*, and helped to maintain commitment by all stakeholders to the program.

The key to success in developing the partnership between school and community is to be found in the relationship-building activities of key players. In this case, the school chose to appoint a business person who was a community leader with extensive overlapping networks outside of the school, rather than a trained educator, to the position of *Step Ahead* Coordinator. This illustrates the school

leadership ethos of risk taking and pushing the boundaries. The data clearly indicate that the benefits of such an appointment have more than justified the risk, in terms of the effectiveness of the Coordinator's relationship-building activities, especially in relation to Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

The *Step Ahead* Coordinator's role is essentially one of creating and maintaining links between school, and current and prospective host employers. In so doing the Coordinator can be described as a 'boundary crosser' who used her credibility within community sectors to build trust and promote dialogue between different groups. As well as wide-ranging internal links within Cooktown, the *Step Ahead* Coordinator also demonstrated the use of extensive external networks in the development and management of the program. The appointment of such a person to the position of *Step Ahead* Coordinator has been significant to the maintenance, and will continue to be significant to the sustainability, of the program. Although this particular person is no longer *Step Ahead* Coordinator and has stepped down as chairperson of the *Step Ahead* Management Committee, she is still a member of the Management Committee. She continues to provide important links with the past, because of her involvement in the initiation and maintenance of the program, and with the future, because of her involvement in a number of community planning groups including the community skills training centre planning committee.

## **Other influencing factors**

### ***Within the school and community***

The high level of commitment of stakeholders to the program is a key theme running across the three phases of *Step Ahead*. Each of the stakeholders demonstrates that they view their role in the program in terms of a shared community vision for the future of their youth, rather than as just a 'job'. Each is willing to invest large amounts of time, energy and/or financial resources to make this vision a reality. However, commitment is not something that just happened; it took many months of careful planning and discussion to build trust between the stakeholders and commitment to the program. Leadership strategies employed by school leaders to build commitment included: wide-ranging and ongoing stakeholder consultation (facilitated through Management Committee meetings, the liaison role of the *Step Ahead* Coordinator, and informal communication); careful selection and monitoring of students and host employers, and publicity and celebration of successful outcomes. The effectiveness of these strategies is illustrated by the fact that the initial high level of commitment of stakeholders is still evident today. This would seem to augur well for the sustainability of *Step Ahead*.

### ***Outside the control of the school and community***

Whilst *Step Ahead* would not have developed in the way it did without visionary school and community leadership, the high level of commitment of stakeholders, and careful research and planning, several factors outside the control of the school and community influenced the program's initiation, maintenance and progression.

On a positive note, the timing of *Step Ahead* was a critical factor, in terms of the availability of external funding and support to initiate VET-in-schools programs, which were beginning to 'take off' from the mid-1990s. Although funding continues to be an issue for the maintenance and progression of the program, it is less critical now than in the initiation and maintenance stages. The decision by Education Queensland to include funding for the *Step Ahead* classroom teacher position in the ongoing staffing profile of the school has done much to reduce resourcing concerns. The funding of several other Federal Government and State Government initiatives also has been timely. Of particular importance were PCAP funding (particularly from 1991 onwards when changed administrative arrangements introduced in Queensland gave considerably more autonomy to communities and their schools to decide how funding would be allocated), and the more recently-introduced ASSPA program. These programs were complementary to the VET-in-schools initiative, as the focus of each was on building and strengthening school-community partnerships.

The other issue regarding the importance of the timing of *Step Ahead* relates to the stage of development of the community itself. The timing of the program, with its emphasis on self-sufficiency and community ownership and responsibility, could not have been better. Emerging from

a period of local government under administration, the community had come to understand the importance of, and realise some measures of success in, controlling its own destiny. Additionally, in Hope Vale the closure of the mission was forcing that community to make decisions for itself. The program also coincided with the Indigenous communities rediscovering and taking pride in their own cultural values and stories.

Publicity, particularly related to the attention the program has received from those outside of Cooktown, is an important factor which has positively influenced the maintenance and further progression of *Step Ahead*. Of particular importance was the video and booklet produced by Education Queensland.

A factor which could have negatively influenced the implementation of *Step Ahead* included education system and other government policies at the time. The response of school leaders in Cooktown was to challenge government policy and practice that did not offer sufficient flexibility to allow them to fully develop *Step Ahead* as a community vision. Such policies included those in relation to funding guidelines for VET-in-schools programs, and the length of the school day. The school found innovative ways to reconcile policy and practice and, in one case, was a catalyst for one national funding body's change of policy. The data clearly indicate that involving and working with education and other government bodies from an early stage, ensured that the school has enjoyed both initial and ongoing support for *Step Ahead*.

## **For the future**

The process of planning and implementing collaborative workshops funded by bodies such as PCAP, ASSPA and school P & C groups, and in particular the process of planning and implementing *Step Ahead*, has been valuable in terms of the community development process. The lessons learnt, the mechanisms developed for group dialogue and action, and the results of what can be achieved when school and community work together, have been catalysts for other community initiatives. They have also provided lessons for other rural communities. However, there is still much to be achieved, as the region deals with the effects of decreasing isolation, increasing opportunities in tourism and related areas, and the need to provide employment opportunities for its increasing population. One area for future development includes the need to investigate the way in which closer links might be forged between the education and public health sectors in Cooktown, in order to make better use of the extensive human, physical and financial resources of each. As Education and Health form by far the largest proportion of government expenditure it might be that there is a need for a 'whole-of-government' approach to this issue. In this and other areas it seems very likely that the school and its leadership will continue to play an active role in the region's development, by continuing to foster existing partnerships and by forging new partnerships.

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## 5. Cowell: A close-knit community opens its eyes

The rural scene in Australia over recent years has featured too many stories of community decline—of third and fourth generation farming families being forced to sell up; of disillusioned rural youth moving away to the city; of small communities withering in size and spirit, as they face a future of uncertainty. With its harsh climatic conditions, economic uncertainty in terms of its fat lamb, cereal and grain production, and lack of opportunities for youth, Cowell could have become another 'casualty' within the rural landscape. Fortunately, it didn't. This case study tells the story of how Cowell 'reinvented' itself by building on its natural assets: its pristine harbour; its generations of knowledge, skills and experience in rural industry, and the strength and determination of its people. By diversifying its industry base to embrace aquaculture in the early 1990s, and by subsequently developing its potential as both a tourism and retirement centre, Cowell today is in a period of economic growth and its outlook for the future seems promising. Change, however, did not come about easily or quickly in this conservative and culturally homogeneous rural community. The case study documents how Cowell gradually 'opened its eyes' to the need to be more outward looking, in terms of seeking new opportunities and ideas from outside the community. It places the school as one of the central players in this process.

### The site

The town of Cowell, with its relatively stable population of 748 (ABS 1997), is situated on the east coast of the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. It forms part of the Franklin Harbour Local Government Area, which has a total population of 1241 (ABS 2001). For the purposes of this study, the Cowell community is represented by the Franklin Harbour Local Government Area. Cowell is 107 km from Whyalla (population 23 650 (ABS 1998)) to the north, and 168 km from Port Lincoln (population 13 305 (ABS 1998)) to the south. Regionally Cowell forms a cluster with Cleve (population 1899 (ABS 1998)) 43 km west and Kimba (population 1249 (ABS 1998)) 86 km north-west, for educational, local government, sporting and health purposes.

Cereal, grains and fat lamb production are the main agricultural activities. Cowell is in a high risk area for drought, and can count on an average of only about one or two good years in five. Many smaller farms have been taken over by larger enterprises. Locals suggest that this harsh environment leads to very conservative attitudes in that people won't try anything new unless they're sure it will work. Many people we spoke to described the community as 'close knit' and supportive. Of the five study sites, Cowell has the greatest percentage of Australian born residents (92 per cent) and the least number of speakers of a language other than English, reflecting the cultural homogeneity of the population.

In the last 10 years the fishing and prawning fleets have moved to Port Lincoln but have been replaced by a booming aquaculture industry, based mainly on oyster growing but also with some fin fish farming, in the sheltered waters of Franklin Harbour. A number of traditional farmers and fishermen have made the change, as aquaculture is less subject to climatic conditions and 'at least you know where your salt is'. In 1999, Cowell produced 46 per cent of South Australia's oyster crop. The industry is significant to the region in economic terms. As one oyster grower explained in the 1999–2000 financial year, 'they're talking a million dozen oysters production, which is five million bucks in round terms, which will be injected into this small economy ...'.

## **The school**

Cowell Area School had an enrolment, in 2000, of 192 students from Reception to Year 12, with six students in Year 11 and nine in Year 12, as well as approximately 20 part-time mature age students. School staff total 30, comprising 18 teaching staff and 12 ancillary staff, a number of whom are employed on a part-time basis. Aquaculture and the marine and littoral environment is a focus throughout the R–12 curriculum. The school has developed its own oyster farm in Franklin Harbour and has been registered as a member of OYSA (Oyster growers of South Australia) for the sale of oysters and potentially of other marine produce. Proceeds will go toward ongoing funding of its aquaculture program.

In addition, Cowell Area School has developed a two-year senior secondary Certificate in Aquaculture course as part of the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). In 2000, there were three Year 11 students and one Year 12 student enrolled in the program. The course is also open to mature-age students, and students from outside Cowell are welcomed. Out-of-area students are accommodated in the new boarding house, which can accommodate six. Training is conducted as a component of more conventional SACE subjects such as Biology, Environmental and Maritime Studies, and Small Business Management. Students also gain experience in practical subjects such as small vessel handling and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), thereby gaining additional certification including their Boat Licence, Radio Operator's Certificate, and First Aid Certificate. All practical vocational subjects provide dual SACE/VET recognition by TAFE (at Certificate 1 or 2 level) or by the Australian Fishing Academy (AFA). Certificate in Aquaculture students also complete a significant practical component of regular work placements with local oyster growers, totalling 200 hours per student over two years.

At the time of our visit in August 2000, the school was in the process of reviewing its Certificate in Aquaculture course offerings to better match the competencies contained in the new Seafood Industry Training Package due for introduction in 2001. This included the proposed introduction of school-based apprenticeships in 2001.

The outward focus of the school is also reflected in its membership of the Eastern Eyre Peninsula Educational Cluster (EEPEC). An informal cluster arrangement has existed between Cowell, Cleve, Kimba and Lock Area Schools, and several primary schools, for a number of years. The schools formalised the arrangement in 2000. The cluster facilitates shared resources, staffing and professional development, as well as enhancing curriculum options, particularly for senior students. For example, as part of the cluster arrangement, the Area Schools each specialise in the teaching of a different VET area: Cowell (aquaculture), Cleve (agriculture) and Kimba (automotive). This broadens the senior secondary offerings to students within the school cluster, while allowing them to remain in their own communities. In addition, the viability of each of the small rural schools is enhanced, rather than threatened, because of its specialist, niche market VET offering.

The School Council voted to introduce new funding arrangements into the school in 2000, in the form of the new State Department of Education Training and Employment's Partnerships 21 initiative. Under Partnerships 21, participating schools are funded on a three-year basis, and receive additional funding on the understanding that they pursue a greater degree of self-management.

## **School contribution to the community**

The school contributes to its community through a variety of both ongoing and event-based interactions. Ongoing interactions include teachers as a community resource, the sharing of school and community resources and facilities, and the school's aquaculture education program. Event-based interactions include a number of collaborative community Arts and environmental projects.



## **'Chalkies' as a community resource**

Staff at Cowell represent a skills base for a wide variety of activities in the local community, acting as initiators, motivators and/or project managers. They feature as coaches, players or committee members in many of the sporting clubs in the town. These activities are a vital source of rural bonding within and between the widely dispersed towns of the Eyre region.

Staff also double as Adult Education teachers, running out-of-hours classes in woodwork, first aid or computing for parents and other community members. Because of their skills and knowledge, they are used as a community resource by local businesses when a computer breaks down or a program malfunctions. As one teacher pointed out, the rewards can't be quantified:

Quite often you get tea cooked for you, you know, come and fix up my computer I'll cook you tea. Good way to meet people ... and a positive ... reflection upon the school. I mean I never turn anybody down that wants help ... I spent an hour and a half at the newsagents just last week to help fix their computer system, and I don't get paid for that, there's no extra money gets put in my pocket. But it's ... not bad, that somebody from the school has those skills and they are willing to help.

## **Sharing resources**

In this small rural community the school is one of the main employers in the town and one of the few sources of regular and reliable income, so its financial importance can't be underestimated. The survival of school and community facilities, such as the swimming pool, is enhanced by their shared use or administration. The swimming pool was built on Education Department land but has only become viable since a community committee and swim club have taken over its administration and promoted its use. As one respondent commented, 'if they [resources] weren't shared neither party might be able to afford them'. Another community member commented on the meshing of school and community:

(It's) just complete knitted interaction ... the school runs the local newsletter which is how I get most of my information ... and the community puts into the newsletter for the feedback information that way. That alone I think just opens the weave up between the community and the school. The local library, and the supply of that, the community put into the library for the school use, and the school put their resources in there for the use of the community, so you get interaction there. The school swimming pool is used by the community, and vice versa ... the community put into the swimming pool.

The Community Library has been incorporated in the new school administration building, making it more visible and accessible to the public. It has brought people without other connections to the school into contact with the school and students. It is also used as an information technology centre to teach community members, including business operators, through occasional Internet cafés, and as a meeting room for the multiplicity of school and community committees. The costs for the Library are shared between the Education Department and the local council. It is run by a Board of Management, with representatives of school staff, local government, and community.

## **Aquaculture education**

### ***Implementation***

Cowell Area School has received much positive publicity as a result of its ongoing aquaculture education initiatives, although some school and community representatives expressed concern that the emphasis on the aquaculture program has tended to overshadow other school contributions to the community. By the early 1990s, the school had already begun to develop an aquaculture focus in its general curriculum. It was a logical progression that the school would also assume a role in providing training to meet the needs of the region's burgeoning aquaculture industry. As a community member explained:

The aquaculture [course at school] evolved with the aquaculture industry ... there was seen a need that was met by the school rather than people who were interested in the industry having to move elsewhere for study in it.

The initial idea for the school to offer a vocational education and training (VET) aquaculture course came from a local oyster grower. This person also had formal links with the school, as a member of the School Council, as well as wider links in education and training circles at both TAFE and University level. The idea received strong support from the Principal and Deputy Principal.

Over the following months the Certificate in Aquaculture course was developed, in close consultation with a variety of industry, education and training bodies, including the South Australian Fishing Industry Training Council (SAFITC), the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) and the Spencer Institute of TAFE at Port Lincoln. As the school did not have a model for the course, much time was devoted to developing a shared vision which would represent the needs of all stakeholders, and ensure a balance was reached between the industry and vocational focus, and the need to provide for tertiary-bound students. A community member recalls:

... everyone had a different idea and that's when you had a storming session that went on for a few years.

Local oyster growers have played and continue to play an important role in the Certificate in Aquaculture course development and the provision of student work placements, as well as in the provision of time and expertise in relation to the development and management of the school's own oyster lease.

Respondents reflected upon some of the problems encountered in setting up the Certificate in Aquaculture program. For example, school staff had to negotiate relationships with a variety of industry and other training organisations with whom they had not previously had any dealings. Other 'teething' troubles were related to school staffing issues, including the failure of staff to utilise the expertise of growers, and the relatively high staff turnaround and resulting lack of continuity of personnel, which slowed down the progress of the course. The following school staff member recalls community frustration:

Because it was such a new industry and a new idea and a niche marketing of school course I think it attracted some people that were looking at developing their résumés rather than developing the actual student growth in aquaculture. So those people have come and gone and now we've got a more stabilised group of people that are passionate about the students ...

### ***Changing direction***

An initial Aquaculture Committee set up in 1993, comprised school staff and several oyster growers, as a sub-committee of the School Council. Following a crisis period in 1997, when the future of the Certificate in Aquaculture course looked uncertain, due to dwindling enrolments and lack of continuity of teaching staff, the original Committee was disbanded. A new aquaculture Board of Management was elected at a community meeting. The composition of the new Board reflected its community-wide focus, with six community members (including several oyster growers), a fishing industry representative and a School Council representative, as well as the Principal, a staff representative, two students, and the school farm manager. The following representative from the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) outlined how the structure, role and degree of autonomy of the new Board of Management differed from that of the original Committee:

The ... most significant thing is that we revamped the program so that it was actually largely managed by the community ... and I'm really grateful to people like [name of oyster grower] from [name of company] and a number of community people who have actually ... taken that on ...

The Board is a sub-committee of the School Council. It has input into all aspects of the Certificate in Aquaculture course including publicity and seeking sponsorship, and makes recommendations to the School Council regarding expenditure. The subsequent increased level of industry and business community involvement and support for the Certificate in Aquaculture is attributed, in some measure, to the activities of the Board of Management, as well as to the activities of the Aquaculture Liaison Officer, appointed on an externally-funded twelve-month contract in 2000.

Cowell again looked towards the Cleve Area School agricultural program to guide the development of its own program. This process was facilitated by the following Cowell aquaculture Board of Management member, who also had links with Cleve Area School:

... so we had a fair bit of knowledge of what was happening up there [at Cleve] .... they've had the same problems as we've had with the aquaculture, we've been able to talk and sort of change some of our problems by looking at what [Cleve has] done. Probably I think one of the major steps forward was having a farm manager, in both places. They [Cleve Area School] certainly weren't doing a lot of good until they got a farm manager, and I think we were struggling a bit until we got one too.

A farm manager was appointed in 1999 to manage the Cowell Area School oyster lease, an integral part of all aquaculture education at the school, including the Certificate in Aquaculture program. The farm manager had previously been the school groundsman, and his appointment was important because it provided continuity to the program and because his direct links with oyster growers facilitated greater sharing of information between school and industry. It also provided the out-of-hours and school holiday maintenance that had been lacking previously.

### **Community Arts projects**

Cowell Area School has been, and is currently, involved with two major and several smaller Arts projects in the community. These have united the school, individuals, service and environment groups in very different ways, though the outcomes for the community are similar.

The catalyst for all these projects is a dynamic young Art teacher whose boundless enthusiasm and naivety let her attempt activities which may have daunted someone more experienced. On her posting to the town she noted the negative effect of empty shops in the main street. She persuaded one property owner to let her art class paint the shop front and use the shop windows to display students' work. The success of this inspired her to tackle the painting of a mural on another shop front. Now she is viewed as a community resource and is called upon to organise any art work for events about the town.

#### ***The fish sculptures***

The idea for the fish sculptures came from a casual conversation between a community-minded parent and the art teacher. Because of the restrictions of the SA Country Arts funding to non-school projects, this idea grew from the simple desire to beautify the school sign, to a striking group of sculpted metal fish spinning on poles at the entrance to the town. The initial support from businesses and participation by individuals was remarkable, with up to 17 people at a time, ranging in age from Year 7 students to men in their 70s, working for 3–5 hours a week over 10 weeks. Elderly people from the cottages for the aged, school students, the local welder and crash repairer, farmers, crane hire businesses, and members of service clubs all pooled resources, practical skills and time to help, as the Art teacher explains:

I had these drawings but ... if we made ... them they'd fall apart, like they wouldn't happen because they weren't practical. I wanted all these men, like farmers, I wanted the people with ideas that would make these things work, and I was excited that they did come.

The project extended beyond its budget, so at the time of our visit the organisers were looking to other external sources for funding to complete the work.

### **Community environment projects**

In 1995–96, the local Landcare group and school students used Federal Government funding to build a shadehouse at the school. The shadehouse was used for propagation of native plants, including mangroves, for replanting in a degraded causeway area. This, plus a series of other school–community projects, were the forerunners of the current ambitious school–community environmental/Arts activity, the mangrove boardwalk.

### ***The mangrove boardwalk: Combining Arts and the environment***

Cowell Area School is currently working in tandem with Coastcare, the local Lions Club and the Franklin Harbour Council to build a mangrove boardwalk, with information rotunda and signage describing the ecology, wildlife and history of Franklin Harbour. The aims of this National Heritage Trust-funded project are to educate locals and the growing numbers of tourists on the importance of mangroves to the local ecosystem, and to the oyster and fishing industry as a food source and fish nursery.

Secondary staff saw that such a project could be incorporated as part of a stage 1 integrated studies course, which requires a combination of individual and group work, and working with people from the community. The school students have designed the rotunda and are providing the visual, graphics and research component of the signage. The Lions Club will provide labour and some materials, and the local council will provide some mechanical input. Time delays in getting plans approved by the Commonwealth Government then the local council meant that the teacher had to use her school Art budget to get students working on the project at the start of the school year. This illustrates the difficulties encountered by collaborative projects in terms of differing funding schedules and time frames. The Coastcare facilitator pointed out:

In some areas we've had councils who have taken the plunge and then ... said we'll spend the \$7000 now and then if it doesn't come into us then we'll not spend money elsewhere. But I guess that's where some of the tricks lie, in terms of trying to keep everyone on the same agenda and same time frame. The risk is ... [with the Art teacher] now jumping in and getting the display stuff done, which is good, but if the school is kept waiting for the Lions and the Council to be ready then the academic year is finished and they are ready to ... build but the school is not ready.

As a spin-off for the aquaculture industry, through the students' involvement in environmental projects, the whole community is gaining a greater awareness of appropriate environmental practices. This will be vital to the survival of the industry in Franklin Harbour in order to prevent future conflict between foreshore development and the need for retention of the mangroves.

Aside from the many social and environmental benefits, the school impacts both directly and indirectly on the local economy. School expenditure contributes directly to local business. This regular source of income is important. The growth of the Certificate in Aquaculture course, its strategy of attracting students from outside the area, and the extent to which it has 'put Cowell on the map' in aquaculture terms, has had a direct impact on the local economy, particularly for the retail and hospitality sectors.

## **Discussion**

### **Nature and extent of the school's contribution to the community**

... the school is well respected as an institution in our community, it's working for everyone, it's proved that it can be relevant to our local circumstances ...

This case study provides evidence to suggest that the school is one of the reasons for the success of Cowell's 'reinvention', from a struggling, conservative rural community, to a burgeoning aquaculture, tourism and retirement centre with a promising future for its youth. Contributions of the school to the 'new' Cowell include the provision of facilities, equipment and expertise to a variety of individuals and groups both within the community and external to the community. Specifically, the school has played a significant role in supporting the growth, and helping to ensure the sustainability of, the aquaculture industry. It has done this by providing a local pool of skilled aquaculture trainees, by raising awareness within the aquaculture industry of issues such as OHS, and within the wider community of issues such as the management and protection of the marine and coastal environment. The school has also been responsible for the generation of economic benefits for the community. The gradually increasing population, and the attendant spin-offs such as increases in housing construction, and the need for increased provision of goods and services locally, are partly due to

Cowell's growing reputation as an aquaculture centre; a reputation that the school has helped to build.

One of the key outcomes of the Certificate in Aquaculture has been the retention of youth in Cowell, largely due to the high employment rate of school VET graduates within the aquaculture and fin fish industries. A former student, who left school prior to the introduction of the Certificate in Aquaculture, recalls:

... not many people ever thought they'd leave school and be able to find a job in Cowell, but now the aquaculture course is available in Cowell ... there is an inclination ... if you wanted to stay in Cowell, you can do the aquaculture course, the aquaculture course has pretty well got a hundred per cent employment rate ...

This outcome has been well documented in previous research on Cowell Area School (Department of Education Training and Employment 1999; Martin & Vincent 1999). Employment of local young people is also important in helping to overcome difficulties, both in attracting and retaining trainees from outside the Cowell region, to work in the aquaculture and fishing industries. This difficulty is due to the 'lack of housing ... limited social opportunities and social networks, inadequate financial support for living away from home' (Department of Education Training and Employment 1999, p. 16). Respondents noted that fishing and aquaculture industry trainees recruited from within the region itself, often through the school's Certificate in Aquaculture program, are more likely to remain in the region once their training is completed because of their existing family and social networks.

The case study also illustrates how the school, through its sharing of resources, its collaborative Arts and environment projects, and its Certificate in Aquaculture program, contributes to the community's social wellbeing. Outcomes of these initiatives were reported as increased community self-confidence and pride, and facilitation of intergenerational trust. For example, the positioning of the new Community Library within the school, and the running of Internet cafés and IT classes, has encouraged greater interaction as more people to drop into the school to learn together using shared resources. A member of the School Council explains:

It makes it easier for the older person because they can talk to the younger ones and relate to them little bit better, you know because the young one comes along and says "Oh I've got a computer that's got a hundred and twenty eight megabyte of RAM", you know the old lady's sitting there, "Well I thought rams run around in the paddock darling".

In another example, the Principal explains how the establishment of a boarding hostel to accommodate out-of-town aquaculture students at the school, stimulated much community interaction and participation, and was instrumental in broadening the community's outlook:

I was honestly quite surprised by the variety of people in the community who actually came to help, to establish gardens, volunteer their time and equipment ... all sorts of people that had nothing to do with the school, you know elderly people ... it actually opened up my eyes a bit in terms of the way a course like that, and our school and community, can make the best of opportunities that have arisen, and our community I think, which like I said has been very conservative, are really opening up their eyes and becoming a lot more flexible, I think themselves.

While the school reflects community attitudes, beliefs and aspirations, it has also been responsible for shaping some of these attitudes and beliefs. In a community characterised by cultural homogeneity and conservatism, staff from the school have introduced new ideas and new ways of doing things into the community. The school has played a role in changing attitudes in respect of the need to embrace change and seek new opportunities from outside the community, by modelling this approach itself. What is important, however, is the way the school has built firmly on positive past experiences and successes as it gradually steered a course into new waters. In this way, a traditionally conservative farming community has gradually grown to accept and embrace change.

The success of the Cowell Area School aquaculture program has not only had an impact locally, but has increased the status of rural schools in general. The following representative from the DETE explains how the school's influence has been felt in other parts of the State, in communities located hundreds of kilometres from Cowell:

... [the Certificate in Aquaculture] provides a focus for schools way outside the community and young people outside of this community to become involved in the industry, a growth industry. An example of that I suppose is [a community] almost 900 km north from here are now running an aquaculture program ... based largely on information and a comprehensive sharing of information between Cowell school community and that school community, so it has a big impact, there is no doubt.

## **Leadership issues**

### ***The nature of the community: Leadership by committee***

Cowell has a very strong sense of community and an abundance of very active service and sporting clubs. In a community used to helping itself, there is a clearly defined and understood organisational structure and leadership process within Cowell. The implementation of new ideas is supported by a process of community consultation and action, most often through an existing committee or through the formation of a new committee. With its relatively high number of committees, and its relatively small population to fill committee roles, there is considerable overlap of roles. Whilst this can be beneficial in terms of enhancing networking capacity, the following ancillary staff member explains how the overlap of roles can cause problems for people:

We're also very busy changing our hats, like one person be involved in five different community hats, in a community group, and sometimes there can be a conflict of interest, and you think ... my goodness, what hat have I got on now?

Shared and inclusive community leadership processes reflect both the egalitarian nature of Cowell, and the large number of small, family-run farms and other businesses. Civic duties are shared, as is the credit for achievements. This involvement also appears to be very evenly distributed between genders and across all ages. In such a community, collaborative decision making, and shared management and leadership roles, are both accepted and expected. There is an unwillingness to single out individuals or particular groups of individuals for 'special' treatment. For example, larger landholders have the same say in community affairs as other community members, and, as the following School Council representative explains, teachers are regarded, first and foremost, as community members:

As soon as the teachers walked into the bar or the lounge, they were accepted straight away, you know they went to a group of parents, and they just talked, they didn't talk like teachers to parents and teachers to students, it was all one on one, everybody equal, but on the education side of it yeah I think it's a plus.

The community's increasing focus on the importance of youth to its future is reflected in youth representation on several community decision-making bodies, including the newly-formed Community Development Group. The following teacher comments on how youth participation in community leadership is facilitated by the relative ease of interaction between students of different ages and between students and adults in the community, with sport being the main link:

You can sit down at the footy and have quite a conversation with some of the kids about not just football but other things as well so, and you know that makes it easier ... for people to interact and get involved with our community.

### ***School leadership structure and processes***

Community leadership processes are reflected in and supported by school leadership structure and processes. In addition, school leadership processes provide a model for community leadership. For example, the key school decision-making body, the School Council, and its sub-committees, provide a model for the opening up of the community and a broadening of its leadership base. This reflects the Principal's aim to involve the general community more directly in school affairs:

I actually think the power has shifted quite a bit, from when I first came here ... back in those days I believe it was a very powerful group, and you tended to have the same people year after year involved in School Council. It tended to be mainly parents of the farming community. I think Council in the last two or three years has changed dramatically, we would have farming families represented ... mining families ... fishermen ... the aquaculture industry, we have people who are shop owners, or work in the business now ... we have a lot of single parents in our school, unemployed people as well ... and if people have got an issue with School Council ... I've worked very hard to get them onto School Council ... School Council to me is about getting a wide view of perspective.

In keeping with its youth focus, representatives of the Student Representative Council (SRC) are integral members of the School Council. There are also representatives of the local council and hospital on the School Council. In general, the broad base of the School Council provides for wide community consultation, although the recent purchase of a school bus that could also double as a community bus caused some concern amongst community members because of inadequate consultation with some of the potential stakeholders.

The reconstituted aquaculture Board of Management which provides leadership for the Certificate in Aquaculture program, also represents a diverse range of community and school stakeholders, and is chaired by a representative from the aquaculture industry. The school's conscious decision to redefine membership of the Board of Management has provided opportunity for increased community leadership, and consequently, increased community ownership, of the program.

The organisational structure of the school supports leadership development within the community. For example, the relatively new community management committee for the boarding house is still 'finding its feet'. The school is guiding the committee's operation at present, by providing administrative and other support and advice as required. When the committee has gained experience and confidence in working together, the role of the school will diminish.

School leadership processes have been increasingly assuming an outward-looking focus. For example, the implementation of the Certificate in Aquaculture in 1993 required the forging of relationships with a number of external funding, training, and other support organisations. The school's membership of the Eastern Eyre Peninsula Educational Cluster is another example, in which Cowell formalised and is beginning to extend mutually beneficial relationships with other schools in the region, in order to facilitate further resource and information sharing, and to maximise student learning outcomes. This 'opening up' of the school is beginning to be reflected in the community, for example, in the extent to which local groups are now beginning to seek external sources of funding for community projects. In the past service clubs and groups like the Parents and Friends (P & F) looked locally for funding. They now display a growing awareness of the need to look beyond Cowell for financial support. This outward focus has also been motivated by economic circumstances, as an ancillary staff member explains:

We can see from our students, that the things aren't going well at home, and financially everyone is really strapped, and instead of us trying to draw on everyone in the community with the struggle ... we've had to seek funding outside of our community, and I think we're more aware these days of the different buckets that there are out there, and of course we get expertise coming in from outside our community that make us aware of what's out there ... I suppose that we've had to really open our eyes, and not be so naive that we can keep ourselves afloat, it's sort of 'wake up and smell the coffee, you can't stay afloat on your own, you need help' ... whereas before I felt that ... we were pretty closed.

### ***Leadership roles within the school and community***

Many informal and formal leadership roles within the community are occupied by women. This is reflected within the school, in which three senior administrative positions are filled by women. It comes as no surprise that the community has produced two ABC South Australian Rural Women of the Year in recent times.

Building on the work of the previous Principal in ensuring the school is responsive to the needs of its youth, and flexible in the way those needs are met, the current Principal continues to empower others within school and community to help realise this vision. She has done this by being willing to take on board new ideas, whether initiated by community members or school staff, by providing support for these ideas, and by fostering a supportive and collaborative school culture. The result of this has been the willingness of school staff to take a leading role in school–community initiatives, such as the role being undertaken by the Art teacher in the community Arts fish sculpture project. In addition, a key role undertaken by the Principal is one of fostering community participation in school decision making and empowering community members to take on key leadership roles. For example, the idea for the Certificate in Aquaculture came from an oyster grower. After initial discussions and support from the Principal and Vice-Principal, the oyster grower used her extensive external networks to identify and bring together representatives from education and training, fishing industry and research sectors, to plan and develop the program. By bringing together people and resources to plan for the future, this person played an important role in enabling the school and community to meet its needs. In turn, her actions were made possible by the level of support provided by the Principal and Vice-Principal.

Empowerment of staff and community members has been the result of a continuous school leadership process characterised by trust, open and two-way communication, and inclusivity. By putting the needs of the students before her own ambitions, and utilising her extensive networks within the community, the current Principal continues to build trust and continues to further embed the school within its community. The following comment from a representative of the School Council illustrates this:

... some Principals are a bit different, like some like to push their own barrow and ... they come to school and say I'm here for four years or five years and I want to do this, this and this, whereas the Principal we've got at the moment says our kids need and this is what we will be doing while I'm here, and I think that's a better option, lot better.

The Principal fosters open communication and consultation between staff, and between staff and community through vehicles such as the School Council. The school and the community both use and value 'leadership by committee', where leadership is a shared process, and decision making and responsibility are open and transparent as well as shared. This openness also extends upward, in respect of the relationship between the school and the Department of Education regional office. The 'open discussion' and 'honest opinion' evident in interactions between the Department of Education regional office and the Principal from Cowell, as well as Principals from each of the schools in the Eastern Eyre Peninsula Educational Cluster, suggests a transparency of leadership at all levels. There is also clear evidence of the alignment of values between community, school, and regional office, regarding the integral role of the school in the community, where all 'value and appreciate the school being really a part of the community'.

The Principal has worked hard to implement the school philosophy of inclusivity to ensure the school is better able to meet the needs of its community. She provides opportunities for the knowledge, skills and talents of a wide variety of community members to be both recognised and utilised. In so doing, she is building the confidence and facilitating the participation of community members who may not consider themselves 'leaders' and who may not ordinarily participate in school or community activities. The following respondent, who, because of difficult economic circumstances, felt marginalised within the community, explains:

I said to [the Principal], 'We're not really involved that much in the community' and she said, 'Yes you are', and I said, 'No we're not really'. She goes, 'Too bad, would you still do it?'. 'Oh alright'.



## **Other influencing factors**

### ***Within the school and community***

Of particular importance for ongoing school–community links is continuity of human resources. It was noted that the development of the Certificate in Aquaculture program, for example, was impeded by lack of continuity of school personnel. However, a number of respondents issued a clear warning that continuity of school staff needed to be carefully balanced against the need for the fresh ideas and enthusiasm of new staff. In the case of the Certificate in Aquaculture, the problem of staff continuity was partly overcome by involving and continuing to involve local oyster growers and other community representatives closely in its management. This allowed ‘for continuance in the event of school personnel moving from the area [as] there is a continuing supply of local personnel with knowledge of the program, its aims and intended outcomes’ (Department of Education Training and Employment 1999, p. 16).

Publicity of the school’s and community’s successes in relation to the community Arts program and Certificate in Aquaculture also has been important to the community. It has contributed to the sustainability of existing linkages, and to the formation of new linkages, by increasing community confidence, trust and pride. In addition, it has enhanced the reputation of the school, which, in turn has helped to maintain and even increase student enrolment numbers, resulting in the continued viability of some curriculum offerings, including the Certificate in Aquaculture. The retention of senior students has impacted favourably on the school’s capacity to contribute to its community.

### ***Outside the school and community***

As in the other case study sites, access to resources is critical to the implementation of many school–community linkages. Regarding the Certificate in Aquaculture program, access to external funding was enhanced by the nature and timeliness of the proposed activity. However, external funding for other initiatives, such as environmental and community Arts projects, could be difficult to access and could cause administrative problems. Inexperience in budgeting on the part of organisers means that if a project goes over budget (as happened with the fish sculptures), alternative sources of finance are hard to find, putting added pressure on the organisers. One way that the school found to address funding restrictions, was to form mutually-beneficial partnerships with other parties. In the case of the Certificate in Aquaculture, a collaborative arrangement was entered into with the two Registered Training Organisations involved in the delivery of certain aspects of the program:

... with the TAFE units that are auspiced, we can teach them and they don’t charge us for the documentation and the validation of those. The AFA are running programs here, and so they’re benefiting by having a site within the town that they don’t then have to hire for instance, so in both of those it tends to be cost neutral.

A number of systemic factors have also influenced the formation and maintenance of school–community partnerships. Systemic factors include the influence of the policies and practices of a variety of government departments (including the South Australian Department of Education Training and Employment), as well as industry-based and other organisations. For example, the Certificate in Aquaculture program is set within the context of a number of government initiatives currently in operation to assist young people. These initiatives include the Eyre Peninsula Regional Strategy, the State Strategic Plan for Vocational Education and Training, and the Vocational Education in Schools Strategy (Department of Education Training and Employment 1999). The recent formalisation of a previously informal school cluster arrangement within Eastern Eyre Peninsula was also significant. These systemic factors have influenced the development of the Certificate in Aquaculture, in particular, by locating their shared purposes and goals within an educational and regional development framework, by clearly articulating those goals to all stakeholders, and by putting in place practices to facilitate desired outcomes, such as the coordination of VET offerings through the school cluster arrangement.

Additionally, the introduction by the Commonwealth Government of traineeships, as part of the VET system, played an important role in the development of the Certificate in Aquaculture. For example, in 1997, when the Certificate in Aquaculture program was in crisis, the introduction of traineeships provided a structured training partnership and motivated a greater number of oyster growers to become actively involved, as the following oyster grower explains:

And (at) the crunch time what really got that going again was timing, because the traineeships came out. So there was the incentive of how much was it to have a trainee.

However, there are several systemic issues that need to be resolved, particularly in relation to the Certificate in Aquaculture program. For example, the introduction of VET-in-schools programs has highlighted the inadequacy of current school insurance, and there is some concern that activities outside those normally undertaken by schools, such as transporting students by boat to the school's oyster, lease may not be covered. At the time of our visit the school was working with the Department of Education, Training and Employment to resolve this situation. The other key issue related to the high cost of public liability insurance required of oyster growers, to protect their employees and students on work placements. The cost was found to be prohibitive for smaller growers who were unable to take on students, thus reducing the number of work placements available within the community.

Although it is too soon to assess the impact of the Partnerships 21 funding arrangements, there is a firm belief that the financial autonomy promised by Partnerships 21 will further enhance the school's capacity to contribute to its community.

## **For the future**

In the future there are indications that closer links will need to be forged between the aquaculture and fishing industries, and environmental groups, in order to continue with efforts to preserve the region's marine and coastal environment. It is important that the community does not become complacent because there is no immediate threat to its environment. It is suggested that the school, through its staff and students, and its curriculum-based and non-curriculum-based community initiatives, can and does play an important role in maintaining community vigilance regarding environmental protection, and in facilitating interactions between key stakeholders. In particular, students have the potential to take these ideas out into the community with their youthful energy, supplementing the limitations of an aging retired population. It should be borne in mind, however, that the full impact of the school's program in aquaculture education is yet to be seen

In other areas, there is still potential for increased consultation between school and other community bodies such as the hospital and local council, before resources are purchased, to ensure optimum sharing of these resources. Finally, it is suggested there may be scope for increased provision of IT training to community members by the school's trained staff, as well as the provision of community access to computer infrastructure through the proposed establishment of a Telecentre in the shared school-community library. Overall, however, the findings presented in this case study suggest that the Cowell community, with its abundance of social capital (trust between individuals and groups, and willingness and ability of the community to work and learn together), is in a very good position not only to respond to change but, more importantly, to initiate it.

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## 6. Margaret River: Making the most of every opportunity

Margaret River is a community with a strong focus on youth. It could be argued that such an environment facilitates the development of school–community initiatives, and to a certain extent this is true. However, Margaret River has not always been this way. The community went through a difficult period in the early 1990s, where intergenerational trust was low, and youth engagement in the community gradually declining. It was only after a concerted effort by school and community leadership committed to change, that the situation was gradually reversed. By adopting a whole-of-town approach to education, school and community developed a new network of relationships and began to work together in ways never before considered. Drawing on the skills, expertise and networks of individuals from school and community, new opportunities for developing school–community linkages were actively sought, from both the public and private sector. Funding was obtained to undertake a number of pilot projects, and both school and community gained a reputation for innovation and best practice in a number of areas. Margaret River was one of the first communities to introduce a Youth Advisory Council which later became a model of best practice within Western Australia; while Margaret River Senior High School was one of the first schools in the State to introduce structured workplace learning (SWL) and to set up a community advisory committee to manage its structured workplace learning program. Today Margaret River is a community with increasing levels of intergenerational trust, which recognises and celebrates the contributions of its youth. The role of the school in facilitating this change is the focus of this case study.

### The site

Margaret River refers to both the township and to the wine-growing region in the south-west corner of Western Australia, stretching from Cape Naturaliste in the north to Cape Leeuwin in the south, and approximately 30 km inland from the coast. The region spans two Shires: the Shire of Busselton to the north, and the Shire of Augusta Margaret River covering the central and southern areas. Due to limitations in terms of time, and human and financial resources, it was decided to focus on the community of Margaret River represented by the Augusta Margaret River Shire (total population 8047 in 1996 (ABS 1996); compared with 2000 population of 9953 (ABS 2001)). Within the Shire the major town is Margaret River (population 2846 (ABS 1996)), but now estimated by Shire officials to be approximately 4000), followed by Augusta (population 1087 (ABS 1996)), and then by the smaller communities of Witchcliffe and Karridale in the south, and Cowaramup and Gracetown in the north. There is a relatively high level of population mobility; in the 1996 Census only 40 per cent of the population were recorded as living at the same address five years before (ABS 1996).

The region is experiencing rapid growth in terms of its economy and population, largely as a result of flourishing viticulture and tourism industries. The pleasant lifestyle and surfing opportunities also attract many newcomers to the region. Whilst a number of families have been and are still involved in dairy farming, recent years have seen the sale of some dairy properties to large viticulture concerns. Both the viticulture and tourism industries provide employment opportunities in the region, although these are largely casual and seasonal. The region also supports a relatively healthy small business sector. The growing number of large and profitable wineries in the region, and relatively high prices for goods and services which are aimed towards the upper end of the tourist market, give rise to a perception that the community is wealthy. However, a number of people commented on the ‘unemployment problem’ in the community, particularly amongst young people who had moved down from the city for lifestyle reasons and were unable (some residents said ‘unwilling’) to secure

permanent work. Statistics show the unemployment rate was 8.9 per cent in 1996 (ABS 1998); of the five case study sites, Margaret River had the second highest rate of unemployment after Meander.

Locals describe the community as 'eclectic' because of the diverse backgrounds, lifestyles and values of its population, including dairy farmers, viticulturalists, professionals such as school teaching staff, local small business owners and operators, environmentalists and alternative lifestyleers, and the unemployed. Because of this diversity, conflict is inevitable; however one of the community's strengths is the way in which many of these conflicts are managed and resolved through dialogue.

After being in Margaret River for only a short time, a number of things strike you:

- The number of diverse groups that make up the community and the community strength that seems to come from this diversity.
- The 'can do' attitude in which formation of committees and sourcing of external funding for projects is second nature to many within the community.
- The large number of services and facilities within the community that tend not be present in many other communities of similar size, including the Aquatic Centre, Skate Park, and Youth Café.
- The value that the community places on education and hence, its strong support for all the local schools.
- The strong focus on youth and the generally positive perception of youth in the community as compared with largely unfavourable perceptions of youth in many other communities within the State (Office of Youth Affairs 1998, pp. 113, 115, 118).

The community focus on youth has been developing gradually over the past six years. Prior to 1995, there was evidence (in a survey of local small business conducted by the Business Enterprise Centre) to suggest that youth were not held in high regard by local businesses. The business sector, in particular, was unwilling to accept youth as employees or even as customers. Commencing in 1995, the school and community took steps to address this problem. With the upgrading of the High School to Senior High School status in 1995, after extensive lobbying by school and community members, school retention rates for senior students began to improve. The subsequent introduction of a senior curriculum at Margaret River Senior High School, which included SWL and Enterprise Education, helped to break down the barriers between youth and the (largely business) community. Around the same time, a Youth Advisory Council, with links to the Shire Council, was established in response to expressed youth needs within the community. The Western Australian Office of Youth Affairs later adopted it as a model for youth participation in community decision making, and it is now in place in a number of communities throughout the State. In addition, young people themselves commented that the local newspaper played an important role in helping to build intergenerational trust by promoting positive attitudes towards youth (Office of Youth Affairs 1998, p. 118).

## **The schools**

The region supports eight schools: four government primary schools, one government senior high school, and three privately-run primary schools (one Catholic, one Montessori, and one family-run school). There are a number of mutually beneficial linkages between the state government schools through sharing of resources, jointly organised sporting and other activities, and the Leeuwin Principals Group which provides a forum for discussion and professional development for state school principals in the area. Similar sharing of resources and joint activities exists between the private schools, though there are fewer linkages between the private and state government schools. All schools enjoy parental involvement. Some, such as the family-run school, require large amounts of parental input into all facets of the school's activities, while parental involvement in state government schools revolves largely around traditional forms of involvement such as the canteen, or

membership of the Parents and Citizens (P & C) and School Council/Management Group. Jointly the schools provide some of the most stable and permanent employment opportunities in the community.

Margaret River Senior High School is the focal point for this case study because of its extensive links with the community. With an enrolment of approximately 600 students from Years 8 to 12 and approximately 50 teaching staff, the school provides secondary and senior secondary education for the entire Augusta Margaret River Shire. It is centrally located in Margaret River township at the 'top' of the town and evidence suggests that the community looks up to the school both literally and metaphorically. Prior to the school gaining senior high status in 1995, students wishing to continue to Years 11 and 12 were bussed to the nearest senior high school some 45 km north of Margaret River. Still others left the region to attend boarding schools, often hundreds of kilometres away.

The school has extensive linkages with, and enjoys strong support from, a wide variety of community sectors. These sectors include: the small business sector (through participation in SWL and Enterprise Education); the viticulture and other rural industry sectors (through the school farm and vineyard); the Shire Council (through student and staff participation in the Youth Advisory Council; through staff membership of the Shire's waste management steering committee); other educational providers (Curtin University, Edith Cowan University and TAFE through the proposed Centre for Wine Excellence); the health sector (the hospital's Director of Nursing is a member of the School Management Group); voluntary emergency services groups (through participation in the State Emergency Services (SES) cadet scheme); the local media; parents (through participation in the P & C and School Management Group); youth and the churches (through the school chaplaincy); retired citizens (through participation in the school's volunteer reading program), and special needs groups (through the community networking program for disabled students). In addition, close ties were formed between the school and a local service club in 1995, when the incoming President of the service club was also the newly elected President of the school's P & C group. This partnership has seen the realisation of a number of ongoing linkages, which have further enhanced the school's capacity to contribute to the community. These linkages include: a mock interview program which links service club members and senior students; partial sponsorship of the school chaplaincy together with sponsorship provided by local churches and the school's P & C group; and sponsorship of a variety of scholarships and leadership opportunities for youth.

## **School contribution to the community**

Margaret River Senior High School, along with the focal schools in each of the other study sites, contributes to its community by way of two key vehicles: curriculum-based and resource-based contributions. Curriculum-based contributions refer to those school-community linkages that have been built specifically to support the development of curriculum options for students. Most interviewees felt that the curriculum reflected the philosophy of formal school leaders to make the school as inclusive as possible and to provide 'a holistic education using a whole-of-town approach'. For example, inclusivity was fostered by programs which targeted specific groups such as disabled students, and students with low levels of literacy and numeracy, while holistic education was fostered by a variety of school curriculum offerings that represented a balance between vocational and general education. A whole-of-town approach, utilising the resources of the community, was central to many curriculum offerings. Whilst the curriculum options were considered effective by most interviewees in fostering inclusivity, a small number commented on the need for additional school structures and initiatives to be put in place to facilitate the assimilation of students from the Augusta community into Margaret River Senior High School. Most interviewees also commented favourably on the holistic focus of the school curriculum, although a small number of interviewees perceived that a better balance was needed between the strong academic focus of the school and the less 'academic' areas of student development such as the creative arts.

Resource-based contributions refer to the use of shared resources such as the community aquatic and recreation centre which is a shared school/community facility, and the commercial kitchen located within the school which is shared between the school and TAFE. There are a number of other

instances in which the school makes its facilities, such as the school auditorium, available for the use of others. This situation is facilitated by a proactive Education Department policy on community use of school facilities:

It is government policy to encourage and support the use of school resources by the wider community. Ideally, community use of schools should occur as widely as is consistent with the educational objectives of the school and should take account the needs of the community (Education Department of Western Australia, *Community Use of School Facilities Policy Guidelines*, June 1997<sup>2</sup>).

However, it was noted by one interviewee that issues such as insurance (for example, the cost of public liability insurance) may be prohibitive for some small community interest groups wishing to utilise school premises to run short courses and workshops.

The school also contributes significantly to the community through its human resources, that is, through students and staff using their skills and expertise for the good of the community. This is in keeping with the philosophy of formal school leaders that the school should lead its community. The following parent, involved in school governance, explains:

There is a very clear policy on the part of [the Principal] and backed up by his very able deputies, that this school must interact with its community and must welcome its community and must lead its community ... it's [the Principal's] vision and it really has made the school as inclusive as it is ...

Because of the extensive nature of the contributions of Margaret River Senior High School to the community, this case study cannot do justice to all those contributions. Instead, four areas have been selected for discussion: three represent curriculum-based vehicles for the school's contributions to the community (vocational and career programs, school recycling, and the volunteer reading program), and the fourth represents a resource-based contribution (SES cadet scheme). These areas have been selected as being representative of the nature and extent of the contributions of the school to its community.

### **Vocational and career programs**

When it gained senior high school status in 1995, the school needed to develop a curriculum to meet the needs of its new cohort of senior students. In designing this new curriculum, school leaders made a conscious decision not to offer discrete vocational programs but to offer instead 'a comprehensive general education that would best prepare [students] for further study, employment, enterprising self-employment and citizenship' (Gorham 1998). This included the introduction of a Work Studies program incorporating SWL, where senior students are mentored by local business owner-operators as they participate in a total of 120 hours of structured work experience spread over their school holidays. The program also includes an enterprise education component, designed to foster entrepreneurial skills and attitudes in youth. As part of enterprise education, students participate in activities such as the annual Enterprise Day which brings together students and local small business owner/operators. Enterprise Day was pioneered by the Margaret River Business Enterprise Centre in 1996 and has since become a national model.

Both SWL and enterprise education were first implemented in Margaret River in the mid-1990s. Keen to adopt the newly-developed national vocational education model of structured workplace learning for senior students, the school's VET Coordinator recommended to the Principal that funding be sought to implement the program. The recommendation received strong support from the Principal, as it fitted well with the school philosophy of education using a whole-of-town approach. At the same time, the Margaret River Business Enterprise Centre was in the process of revising its

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<sup>2</sup> Since our visit to Margaret River, the new *School Education Act 1999* and *School Education Regulations 2000* came into operation, on 1 January 2001. As a result of this, a review of the EDWA's policies, procedures and guidelines was underway at the time this case study was being prepared.

focus and goals, to better meet the needs of local small business operators. Following a survey of the needs of local small business operators, the Business Enterprise Centre decided to target youth training and development as a key focus for its activities. It attracted funding to implement a pilot enterprise education program for school students, which facilitated a close working relationship between the Business Enterprise Centre and the school. The relationship is built on shared core values, in that the school philosophy to provide a 'holistic education using a whole-of-town approach, which lifts the self-esteem and confidence of all ... eliminating ... any investment in the "tall poppy syndrome"' (Gorham & Collins 1999, p. 46), is consistent with the philosophy of the Business Enterprise Centre which considers enterprise education in Margaret River as the responsibility of the school, the business community and the Business Enterprise Centre (Maidment 1998).

As with most other initiatives introduced within the school, the process of implementing SWL and enterprise education was carefully researched and planned to align with the needs of students (in terms of vocational, career and personal development) and the community (in terms of increasing vocational awareness, knowledge and skills amongst youth). They were also designed to align with key industries in the region (local small businesses, hospitality/tourism, viticulture), and to draw upon the wealth of expertise and skills available within the community. In developing the initiatives, the school's VET Coordinator and the facilitator of the Business Enterprise Centre each played a key role in gaining the trust and support of local business people. Speaking of his role in building employer support for SWL, for example, the school VET Coordinator highlights the importance of communication and consultation:

[We] let the employers know that they are part of a process and we always talk of them as business partners and there's no such thing as we've decided to do this, it has to be a process of consultation and how would this go down.

To ensure community concerns and interests were represented, key community stakeholders were involved in the planning and development of the vocational programs offered through the school. For example, stakeholders from the business sector participated in reference groups, convened by the Business Enterprise Centre, to determine the direction of enterprise education, while a committee of school staff and community members including the facilitator of the Business Enterprise Centre, the President of the P & C, and key industry and service club leaders, was formed to manage the SWL program. Its members were recognised as leaders in the community, with extensive networks within and outside Margaret River. Committee members were able to ensure the program was well received and supported by the business sector, and also undertook the day-to-day organisation of the program, including the recruitment of new employers. The following committee member, himself a small business owner/operator, believes the leadership role of the committee has been one of the strengths of the program:

I think that is one of the strengths of the program that [an employer having problems with an SWL student] rang me and not the school, yeah, I think that just shows how strong the committee was ... and people recognised that the committee were very much part of running the show, that they could talk to us and that was as good as talking to the school.

The committee has been so successful in empowering employers to take control of the program, that it has gone into recess. Several of its members are now involved in other planning committees, including planning for the new Centre of Wine Excellence, that will see a university presence in Margaret River.

SWL is now essentially self-managing, with individual employers initiating contact with the school as appropriate. The business community now has an expectation of ongoing participation in the program, which would suggest that the sustainability of the program seems assured. However, on our return visit to the site in June 2001 to present findings from the study, the Principal and VET Coordinator expressed concern about the future of SWL due to recommendations contained in a recently released state government review into Post Compulsory Education (Curriculum Council



2000). The review recommends an integration of general and vocational learning, which would see SWL offered only as an extension program for some courses, rather than as a program in its own right. There is some indication, however, that the position presented in the review may not have received widespread acceptance within the State. Coupled with this review, the school reported a growing reluctance among students to participate in SWL during their school holidays. As a result of both the review and student concerns, the school is currently in the process of reviewing its SWL policy and procedures.

### **School recycling**

The school runs a recycling program, which includes paper recycling, and a worm farm designed to use waste products from the school farm. It is coordinated by a member of the teaching staff, as an integral part of the curriculum for a Year 10 Maths class requiring extra numeracy tuition, and also receives support from other students. The recycling program began in 1999 as the result of the teacher's concern about paper wastage within the school. The idea of introducing a school recycling program was subsequently supported by formal school leadership. Initially, the teacher did much of the coordination of the project in his spare time, but support in terms of allocation of non-contact hours to coordinate the program has since been provided by school administration. School recycling efforts are enhanced by the support of several other staff members who assist in publicity and the preparation of funding applications. The program has been successful in attracting funding from several government and private sources, which has allowed the project to develop more quickly because funds have been available for the purchase of large items of equipment. The recycling program also receives community support. For example, a local bricklayer has offered his services to build large composting bays so paper recycling can be undertaken on a larger scale, and the resulting compost fed back into the school vineyard. As the program develops, it is expected that more community support will be sought.

As well as reducing paper wastage within the school, the program has raised school and community awareness of the need to recycle materials where possible. It has provided a model and source of leadership for the community-recycling program instituted by the Shire Council only recently. In addition, the teacher in charge of the school recycling program is a member of the Shire Council waste management steering committee, and runs workshops on worm farming and composting for the Shire. This further facilitates the sharing of knowledge and expertise between school and community. The program is also a source of enterprise education for students, who, at the time of our visit, were in the process of planning, developing and marketing wooden newspaper stackers to aid community members in newspaper recycling.

### **Volunteer reading program**

For students with identified literacy needs, the school has been operating a volunteer reading program which started in 1998. The purpose of the program is to match community volunteers with students in need of extra literacy tuition and support in terms of developing self-confidence. It recruits mainly retired members of the community as volunteer literacy tutors/mentors, to work with students on a one-to-one basis once a week. Community volunteers are recruited largely by word of mouth, through service clubs and the church community. The Coordinator describes why the program intentionally targeted retired community members:

We felt that's what would be best for the program, the students would feel comfortable with a grandfather, or a grandmother, figure ... I thought they would have more time to give.

The idea for introducing a reading program in the school first came from the school's literacy teacher, who worked with the school literacy committee to plan its implementation. Because of her workload, the literacy teacher was unable to coordinate the program, so the school Librarian, who was also a member of the literacy committee, volunteered for the position. Although it is modelled on a statewide community volunteer literacy program, the school runs its own program independently, as the state program was oversubscribed, and the need in the school for additional literacy tutoring was pressing. No funding was available to set up the program, 'just the time that we gave to it',

although some school library funding was used to purchase initial resources. Subsequently, school administration has allocated a small amount of annual funding to the program.

There have been some problems caused by lack of sufficient space to accommodate tutors and students, and the heavy workload of the Coordinator in terms of the amount of time needed to research, develop and implement the necessary procedures to provide adequate support and protection for both students and community volunteers. The program is still evolving, and solutions to these concerns were being considered at the time of our visit.

Despite the concerns noted above, the volunteer reading program has achieved a level of success in terms of improving the literacy, interpersonal skills, and self-confidence of students. It has also provided an outlet for retired people, a hitherto largely untapped resource in Margaret River, to contribute to the community.

### **State Emergency Services cadets**

In 1998, the school also set up an SES cadet scheme. The purpose of the program is to foster leadership development within youth, particularly amongst the '80 per cent of kids who are just average kids, they'll never need special help and they'll never be high flyers'. The program was established as part of the cadet-in-high-schools scheme, an initiative of the Western Australian Office of Youth Affairs. With the support of the Principal, a representative from the Office of Youth Affairs facilitated a public meeting to gauge community support for the initiative. The meeting was attended by senior high school staff and P & C representatives, representatives from the region's other schools, and a number of individuals already involved in emergency services groups, such as the Bush Fire Brigade. The community indicated their support for the initiative at that meeting, and a teacher from Margaret River Senior High School accepted the position of Cadet Coordinator. It was decided at the community meeting to run an SES cadet scheme rather than a military cadet scheme, to reflect the strong environmental focus of the community and in recognition of the activities of the SES in respect of a recent coastal tragedy in the region.

Although the scheme is strongly supported by formal school leadership, and makes use of school facilities and equipment, it does not operate as part of the school curriculum, as is the case in some other schools within the State. Instead, school leaders decided the program would be run on an optional basis out of school hours. The reason for this was to ensure greater community involvement and ownership, and ultimately, sustainability of the program.

The program relies, to a large extent, on the support of individuals from the region's various emergency services groups (including the State Emergency Services and Bush Fire Brigade), who provide many of the physical and human resources necessary for cadet training. The teacher who coordinates the cadets has spent much time building this support base, both within the school and community. A school staff member explains:

[Name of teacher] runs that program, now he's the one with the vision, the drive, the enthusiasm to make it happen. No community member would come in and make it happen within the school. So he's the key person there, but you know he's got the nous to realise that he's got to get other key people on side. So he's got our fire chief from the local district involved in that ... he's got parents involved in that, he's got other teachers involved in that, he works with student services who have got people like our chaplain, school psych and our year leaders, and because of that one key person, then engaging all of those others, it happens ...

Parents are also important resources, providing assistance according to their abilities and interests. For example, by voluntarily taking on responsibility for arranging organisational details like transport and equipment for camps, parents have freed up the Coordinator to undertake other activities. The Principal explains:

Schools don't have to worry about going and organising support structures and trucks and stuff like that ... they [community members] put up their hands to organise bits and pieces which is

great ... that's why I think we can sustain the programs, because without their support you couldn't sustain it ...

As well as providing leadership opportunities for youth and community members, the cadet scheme has increased young people's awareness of the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of community volunteerism.

## Discussion

### **Nature and extent of the school's contribution to the community**

The introduction of Years 11 and 12 into the school in 1995, and the subsequent development of increased school–community linkages, particularly through curriculum-based initiatives such as SWL, enterprise education, and the volunteer reading program, saw a number of benefits for the youth of Margaret River. These included increased school retention rates and increased academic achievement in comparison with other schools within the State. For example, the Principal notes that for 'the last two years we've been one of the top two performing schools on tertiary entrance results, and we've been up there in the top 20 schools of all schools, government and private and metropolitan and country'. As young people became involved to a greater extent in the economic, social and civic life of the community, they gained skills, knowledge, experience and a greater understanding of the way in which workplaces and voluntary organisations operate. For some students these increased linkages with the adult community led to part-time employment while still at school, to apprenticeships or traineeships on leaving school, or to opportunities for self-employment. For most students, the key outcome was that they learned more about themselves, their capabilities and the value of their contributions to the community. They reported increased levels of self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of these interactions, as the following SWL student explains:

... I think it does a lot for your personality, getting out and doing work experience ... I think mostly I'm grateful that I actually made sort of friends out of more adults in the community that I never would have met otherwise.

Individuals within the community have also benefited from increased linkages with the school. For retired citizens, purposeful involvement with the school through the volunteer reading scheme has helped to increase their feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem, and of being needed and valued within the community. The following retired community member explains:

I just absolutely love it, you know I really love this boy so much and the nice thing is that I think he might think I'm alright, so you know it's a very satisfying thing, the contact ... and I felt attracted to the idea of being involved in the community ... in something that I felt confident I could do ...

Employers involved with the school through SWL also reported increased self-confidence and self-esteem as their skills and knowledge were recognised and valued by the school. Some employers reported an increase in their own management and leadership skills and abilities, as a result of working with school staff in planning and providing work placement experiences for students.

The school has played a role in shaping not only school culture, but also community culture. Through the activities of the Principal, and supported by other formal school leaders, a school culture has been forged in which, as one parent notes, 'standards are high, and the standards are set and maintained, they're not easily compromised'. These standards of excellence have become part of the community culture as well, as the following P & C member notes:

Before the Principal's arrival in 1994 there was a culture in the town and the school of near enough is good enough, and I think his crusading zeal has left its mark and not only on the school but very much on the community.

One of the key contributions of the Margaret River Senior High School to its community is the role it has played in helping to reintegrate youth back into the community. School initiatives such as the

volunteer reading program and SWL have helped to foster greater understanding and cooperation between different age groups. The building of community capacity in terms of fostering intergenerational trust has been particularly significant to Margaret River. By the early 1990s the barriers that had gradually built up between youth and the business sector, in particular, had resulted in a lack of youth engagement in the community and low levels of trust between the two groups. Some six years later, the findings of a study by the Western Australian Office of Youth Affairs tell a different story, as the following teacher explains:

... and this report now in 1999 ... says that the view of the town's employers of young people in the school is excellent. So if we've got a turn around in six years like that then something must have happened. And when we look at it I suppose, in our role of responsibility is that it's the work-based learning programs, our cadet programs, and community networking and so on and so forth, and [the Principal's] insistence that the community comes into the school and teachers go out into the community.

The other key community outcome of school initiatives such as the SES cadets has been awareness raising of the importance of volunteerism in the community. The development and maintenance of a healthy volunteer sector is acknowledged as integral to rural community development (Kenyon 1999). By raising youth awareness of the personal and community benefits of volunteerism, through school–community initiatives, there are some indications of a positive future for voluntary services in this rural community. The role of the school in awareness raising is illustrated by the fact that, last year, three SES cadets also joined the regional State Emergency Services group.

## **Leadership issues**

The extent and sustainability of school–community linkages in Margaret River is driven by the shared vision of school and community leadership, that educating and developing youth is a joint school–community responsibility and that there are many benefits to be gained from the symbiotic relationship between school and community. The relationship is facilitated by school and community leadership that is innovative and receptive to new ideas. Findings from this case study suggest that extensive linkages between school and community, and the way in which these linkages have been built and sustained, is dependent to a large extent upon the nature of school leadership.

### ***The nature of school leadership***

Formal school leaders (Principal and senior administrative staff) have facilitated school–community linkages by creating a collaborative school culture based on trust and mutual respect. This is exemplified in the school's collaborative approach to problem solving, which one of the teachers described in the following way:

There's not much that one person does that other people don't know what's happening ... asking for help at school is not seen as a sign of weakness but it's seen as actually the norm. It's expected that if you're dealing with an issue then you network it as well and get as much input as you can.

This practice extends beyond the school, into the community. For example, the VET Coordinator and other staff involved in SWL consult regularly with employers in order to resolve issues and concerns in relation to students on work placement.

There are a number of groups involved in formal school leadership, including the School Management Group<sup>3</sup>, the Student Representative Council, the P & C, and the SWL committee, which is now in recess. Together, these groups represent the interests of students, parents, employers and other key community stakeholders in education. Relationships between these groups and school administration reflect mutual respect and a clear sense of shared vision. For example, the P & C member in the first extract describes the relationship between formal school leaders (school administration) and the P & C:

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<sup>3</sup> The School Management Group is similar to a School Council. It is comprised of ten school representatives and four community representatives, and makes decisions on school policies, procedures, budgets and capital works programs.

... the P & C is very closely aligned with the school administration, there's a lot of mutual respect, we don't always agree, we've had some very strong differences but we respect each other ... I think it comes down to a vision thing, there's no doubt that there is a sense of shared vision that the school is very important in this community and of course hence the reciprocal.

In the second extract, a school staff member, who does not occupy a formal leadership position within the school, examines the relationship between school administration and the School Management Group, which is characterised by respect for the ideas and input of all:

There doesn't seem to be in the school a real idea of hanging onto the institution ... if someone could put up a case for changing things or for a new idea then it's discussed and weighed up on its merit ... I see it as being a very democratic group in that whether the idea's put forward by the Principal or by a cleaner, it still gets the same amount of air time ... it's discussed with equal attention.

Mutual respect is at the heart of conflict resolution within the school. For example, the catalyst for greater parental and community participation in school governance (through membership of the School Management Group) was a conflict over what parents perceived as inadequate parental consultation regarding a proposed change to the school dress code. A representative of the P & C explains:

... out of that sense of frustration on our part there came a suggestion from one of our parents that maybe it would be a good idea if we could have a voice on the School Management Group to stop that sort of thing ... what was perhaps initially ... a point of difference became a catalyst for some very positive change.

The parent body subsequently gained two, and later four, representatives on the School Management Group. This increase in the extent of parental participation in school governance was facilitated by three factors: strong support from school leadership; timing in terms of an identified 'need' or reason for the parent body to assume a greater role in school governance, and the gradual implementation of the change, first through informal attendance by parent representatives at School Management Group meetings, later followed by formal participation and membership.

Significantly, the extent of parental and community participation in school governance bodies, and the relationship between these bodies (for example, the P & C President is also a member of the School Management Group), has been the catalyst for other school–community linkages:

I think that the School Management Group now is so inclusive of the P & C, having four of us sit on a body of what, 14, something like that, I think it augurs well for [the future of school–community linkages].

### ***Empowering others to undertake a leadership role***

By creating a collaborative school culture based on mutual respect, formal school leaders have empowered others within the school and community to undertake leadership roles. School staff and students have been empowered by formal school leadership to initiate and develop school–community linkages, and have received both managerial and operational support for their activities. The school's recycling program is a good example. In the first instance, the teacher was empowered to initiate the program, in direct response to environmental concerns regarding paper wastage within the school. He was supported in this initiative by formal school leadership. In turn, the teacher empowered students to undertake a leadership role in relation to recycling not only in the school, but also in helping to raise awareness of recycling issues within the wider community. As the school recycling program gained recognition and acceptance within the community, the teacher has been empowered to undertake a community leadership role in relation to recycling, by participating in the Council waste management steering committee which was responsible for recently implementing a community kerbside recycling program

The SES cadet scheme is an example of formal school leadership empowering school staff, community members and students to play an active leadership role in the community's voluntary

services sector. It also illustrates the school and community's whole-of-town approach to educating youth. Support for the cadet scheme was provided by formal school leadership and by a government department. Because successful operation of the scheme involved the input of community members, the Cadet Coordinator (a school teacher) identified and set about developing relationships with parents and with individuals from the region's emergency services groups. As a result of fostering community ownership of the program, the Coordinator empowered individuals from emergency services groups to provide instruction to cadets, and empowered parents to provide leadership to the program in other areas (for example, camp organisation).

The third example of formal school leaders empowering others to undertake a leadership role relates to the process of initiating and developing structured workplace learning. This program was initiated by the VET Coordinator at the school, and supported at a managerial and operational level by the Principal. The availability of Federal Government funding was also important to the implementation of SWL. At an early stage, leadership of the program was moved out into the community, by forming an SWL management committee, which included key community leaders such as the facilitator of the Business Enterprise Centre. The committee played an important role in recruiting employers to the program, and together with the VET Coordinator, in empowering local employers to play a role in youth development. As the VET Coordinator noted:

A lot of these people [employers involved in SWL] don't realise how good a teacher they are ... and see there is a lot of untapped energy out there, in the community.

Each of these examples illustrates leadership processes which focus on facilitating interactions and building relationships, both within the school and between school and community members. This process has provided others with the confidence and opportunities to undertake a leadership role within their own school and community. The basis of the leadership processes in each example is shared values between school and community regarding the importance of their youth and the need to foster youth development through a whole-of-town approach. What each of these programs has in common is that they are supported by formal school leadership at a managerial level, but also at an operational level, in terms of allocating additional administrative (non-student contact time) time to staff to set up and maintain these school–community linkages, and in terms of providing additional school administrative support as required.

### ***Summary***

By forming strategic alliances with community leaders from a number of different areas, including the Shire Council, the business community, service clubs, and emergency services groups, the school has developed a number of innovative curriculum-based and non-curriculum-based initiatives based on a whole-of-town approach. In particular, formal school leaders have developed relationships with two key community individuals—the P & C President who runs his own professional practice, and the facilitator of the Business Development Centre (formerly the Business Enterprise Centre)—which have been central to the development of a number of school–community linkages. These individuals have used their positions of trust and respect within the community to build support for school initiatives.

It is an intentional leadership strategy that the school contributions featured in this case study have been 'pushed out' into the community. This strategy has seen some initiatives intentionally operated out of school hours (for example, SES cadets and SWL), as well as the planned participation of community members in the management, operation and/or funding of initiatives (for example, the SWL management committee, the use of community volunteers in the volunteer reading and SES cadets programs). By giving the community a sense of ownership of the programs, and by actively encouraging and supporting individuals to undertake leadership roles in school initiatives, formal school leaders have put in place procedures likely to ensure the development and sustainability of school–community linkages.

## **Other influencing factors**

### ***Within the school and community***

The media (local newspaper and radio station) play an important role in influencing the school–community relationship in Margaret River. Formal school leaders noted that good school–community relations revolved around building and maintaining a good reputation and a favourable perception of the school within the community, and that, to be effective, public relations building needed to be an ongoing task and not just restricted to reporting of one-off ‘events’ in the school calendar.

Accordingly, the school has developed strong school–media relations, and the P & C President has an open invitation from the local newspaper to write a regular report on the school’s activities:

... part of my role is ... to counter the occasional bit of negativity or the apathy towards the school, which people in all communities exhibit. They just don’t realise what a resource they have here and I think it is up to the school and the school community, of which I am a part, to make people realise some of the myriad programs that are going on at any one time ... and I’m very grateful to the local newspaper for giving me the opportunity to write ...

Not all media publicity of the school is positive. However, school leaders are careful to ensure that any misrepresentations or misperceptions of the school and its students within the media are quickly and publicly corrected.

The other key influencing factor which influences the school–community partnership is the ability and willingness of school and community members to seek and secure funding opportunities to develop new initiatives or expand existing ones. This is partly attributed to the background of community members, a number of whom have brought into the community well developed skills in lobbying, negotiation and tendering and grant application processes, as well as access to broad organisational networks within and external to the State. There is an ethos of innovation within the school and community, so opportunities to trial or pilot projects are actively sought. For example, the school was one of the first in the State to implement structured workplace learning, and to convene a community committee to manage the program. A number of interviewees acknowledged that the community was fortunate to have such a community human resource base to draw upon, and suggested the reason for this was because a number of skilled, professional people had relocated to Margaret River from Perth and elsewhere, for lifestyle reasons. Whilst the availability of human resources has been important to development within Margaret River, formal school and community leadership (discussed in the previous section) has played a central role in identifying, fostering and harnessing their skills and abilities for the benefit of the community.

### ***Outside the school and community***

The decision to make Margaret River a senior high school influenced the nature and extent of school–community linkages. The presence in the school and community of senior students, and the need to provide appropriate curriculum options for them, stimulated greater school–community engagement. In at least one other site (Cooktown), the need to provide opportunities for senior students who had not previously been catered for by the school, was a catalyst for school–community interaction. Approval and funding for upgrading the high school to senior high school status ultimately came from the Western Australian Government. However, the decision to upgrade the school in 1995 was a direct result of a number of years of extensive school and community lobbying. For a community in a ‘safe Liberal seat’, there was no incentive for the Government to give high priority to substantial development within Margaret River. Before school and community joined forces to lobby for school redevelopment, the school had experienced some ten years of frustration of ‘going through the right channels’, only to find each year that school redevelopment plans had again ‘dropped off the [government funding] list’ in favour of other schools elsewhere in the State.

In this site, as for most of the other study sites, access to initial funding and external support was important in order to implement large-scale school–community linkages, including SWL and the cadet-in-high-schools program. For example, the Office of Youth Affairs in Western Australia provided funding and assistance in setting up the cadet scheme. Whilst government funding

facilitated several key school–community initiatives, the driver in each case was the alignment of vision between funding body and school leadership. In particular, formal school leaders in Margaret River demonstrated a willingness to capitalise on opportunities provided by government policy and funding.

## **For the future**

As a vibrant community located in one of the fastest growing regions of Western Australia, Margaret River has much to look forward to in the future. Opportunities provided by the planned Centre of Wine Excellence, for example, include a university presence in Margaret River and proposed links between the University, TAFE and the Margaret River Senior High School in the delivery and articulation of viticulture education. As the community continues to grow and attract business investors, opportunities for commercial property development and for the local building and construction, and associated industries, have increased significantly.

The innovative and forward-thinking approach of the community is very much reflected in Margaret River Senior High School, in which new opportunities to meet the needs of students and to increase the linkages between school and community are actively sought. If the school is to continue its role as a leader within its community, it will need to not only consolidate its linkages with the educational, business and local government sectors, but also continue to value the diversity of the community's population and the school's philosophy of inclusivity. To this end, there would seem to be further scope for the school to explore the possibility of extending its linkages with two community groups: the elderly and those representing lower socioeconomic groupings, including the unemployed. The volunteer reading program has proved an effective starting point for involvement of retired citizens in the school, but it would seem that retired citizens are still a largely untapped resource in Margaret River. Regarding the school's relationship with community members from lower socioeconomic groupings, it would seem that representatives from this group would benefit from support and active encouragement to take a greater role in school governance, in terms of membership of the P & C and the School Management Group. This would further enhance the decision making capabilities of the school, by ensuring more broad-based community representation.



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## 7. Meander: Common ground uniting a community

In 1991, Meander Primary School was threatened with closure by the State Government. Although educational grounds were cited as the reason for this, the reality was economic. The school, with its low student numbers and high-maintenance, National Trust classified historic buildings, had been left to run down. Far from accepting this decision, parents and staff rallied together to lobby politicians from all parties, and to produce a 50-page book, *Meander Primary School, An Excellent Small School*, to present to the Education Minister. The children wrote letters to the newspapers to save their school. The fight to save the school combined the dogged determination and 'do-it-yourself' attitude of the traditional farming community with the campaigning skills of the environmentally-active 'hippies'. In an overwhelming display of community unity the school was saved, and has continued to grow in the last decade in terms of student numbers and reputation. While always focusing on the core activity of educating its children, Meander Primary School has also diversified by actively taking on a variety of other roles within the community. The school plays an important part in meeting community needs in areas as diverse as technology and communications, the Arts, the environment, and as a mediator building social cohesion.

### The site

Meander is a small village of 258 (ABS 1998) situated in the central north of Tasmania on the Meander River and nestled under the Great Western Tiers. It is 15 km from the rural centre of Deloraine (population 2168 (ABS 1998)), 30 km from Westbury (population 1280 (ABS 1998)) which is the administrative centre for the Meander Valley Council, and approximately 65 km from Launceston (population 70 256 (ABS 1999b)), Tasmania's second largest city. The Meander Valley Council covers an area of 3821 square kilometres with a population of 9991 (ABS 1998). Although it is currently the fourth fastest growing Local Government Area in Tasmania (ABS 1999a), growth is mainly in the regional centres. The rural section of the Local Government Area, including Meander, has experienced a small population decline.

Of the five case study sites, Census Data (ABS 1998) shows that the Meander region has the highest unemployment rate at 12.6 per cent. Meander is a diverse community comprising farmers, alternative lifestylers, professional people and a small Indigenous population of 2.3 per cent (ABS 1999a). The region's sources of economic activity reflect the diversity of its population. Meander's main industries are agriculture and timber which were the mainstays of European settlement commencing in the late 1820s. The river's flood plains provide good soil for grazing beef cattle, sheep and for dairying and limited cropping. However, rural industry, as everywhere, is changing rapidly and producers are finding it hard to adapt:

You can't just bung a few sheep on a paddock and then sell lambs every now and then ... that's just not the way farmers are going to succeed any more.

The slopes of the Tiers and, more recently, timber plantations, have provided the raw product for an extensive timber industry now represented locally by a sawmiller and timber retailer which is the major business employer in the town. Tourism and Arts and Crafts have lately played a greater cultural and economic role, with Deloraine becoming the centre of a thriving Arts and Craft community and an important tourist centre. This is partly attributable to the large influx into the Meander area of new settlers, 'hippies', 'greenies' or alternative lifestylers in the 1970s and 80s who moved onto cheap smallholdings which were too marginal to be commercially productive. This boost to the population of the area brought different skills bases with a strong emphasis on Music and the

Arts, and different attitudes to the established industries, especially forestry operations. The public culmination of this movement was the annual Jackeys Marsh Forest Festival and the various protests (most recently the Mother Cummings campaign), which divided the community along environmental lines. As a consequence, there are a large number of active Landcare groups in the Meander Valley catchment with widely differing philosophies. The ‘newcomers’ have been joined more recently by professionals who want a rural lifestyle but who commute to Launceston or rely on the city for their income base. Ready access to Information Technology services in the region has facilitated this process.

## The school

Meander is the only site in the set of case studies where the sole public education provider is a primary school. Meander Primary School is situated in the centre of the village, which also consists of a small store, a hall, sports grounds, the timber supplier, several churches, and a number of scattered houses. It was established as West Meander School in 1891 with 19 pupils, at the request of residents. Gradually over the years, with the closure of other small schools including Jackeys Marsh, Montana and Golden Valley, Meander Primary acquired their buildings and students. The buildings have been classified by the National Trust, and provide an interesting and unified collection of classrooms, and a metaphor for the history of the school.

Meander Primary currently has 89 students (after a peak of 110 in 1998) from Kindergarten to Grade 6, eight teaching staff and five non-teaching staff. It is anticipated that this student population will be maintained into the foreseeable future. There is also a playgroup for pre-school children run by one of the ancillary staff. Post-primary, most students travel to Deloraine High School for Years 7 to 10 and to Launceston or Devonport for Years 11 and 12.

Meander Primary does not simply contribute to the community; it is the focal centre of the Meander community, the ‘glue’ holding together an otherwise divided community and building on the strengths of its diversity. As Meander has no pub or other regular social centre, the school has always played a vital part in the community as its informal social centre and, through the Parents and Friends (P & F), as its more formal social events coordinator. The school is the focus for activities such as the school fair, bush dances and concerts, as well as providing a drop-in centre for parents, a playgroup for younger children, and a venue for community meetings, all of which help overcome rural isolation. Recently the Fire Brigade approached the school to revive the Bonfire night fireworks display. As with many other initiatives, the Principal readily embraced the revival of this community tradition: ‘... they just brought it up and we said yeah let’s do it’. Through these activities the school has played an important role in rebuilding social capital in a divided community. As one parent commented:

... we’re all earnestly connected to the school because our kids go to the school ... they do the bushdances and all kinds of artistic stuff in here and it is a great way for people to actually get together on some issue that’s not vexatious to them. So yeah the school is mostly the focal point for any of the getting together that does get done.

School and community facilities are shared to such an extent that there is barely a division between the two. The school hires or lends out a range of equipment making it what one parent called a ‘community resource hub’. It also makes use of the community hall, oval, basketball court and tennis court, working in partnership with the hall committee and Council to resurface the court, erect netball poles, and build a shelter shed. The establishment in 1998 of a Community Online Access Centre within the school has further embedded the school within the community, as well as bringing a wider circle of people into the school.

Fostering a ‘family atmosphere of mutual support and trust for lifelong learning with respect and equity’, and encouragement of ‘strong parent support’, are key points in the school vision statement. The following comment by a parent, on the family school atmosphere of Meander Primary, is typical:

... it's not like a school it's probably more like ... a family ... it's like (the children) are leaving one family and coming into another family. Yeah the kids are happy ... and I'm happy. I can walk in and out of the place, if I want to come in here and have a cup of tea. Even if I don't want to go into the classroom ... it just has that inviting, welcoming (atmosphere) and your participation, it's appreciated and wanted.

There is a tradition of lifelong connection with the school, as parents and grandparents take part in school activities. Some children may be the fourth or fifth generation to attend the school. Of the staff, 88 per cent live locally, many are also parents of current or past students, and 38 per cent are on their second assignment at the school, enhancing the family atmosphere. As the Principal noted:

The thing about this school compared to others is there is less bureaucracy, it's less conservative ... relationships are important and not so much the formal structures.

The fact that the staff have managed to retain the school's neutrality and promote tolerance of diversity has been praised by respondents from a variety of backgrounds, and explains the support for and success of the school in the local community. The following non-teaching staff member explains:

I'd say the school is probably the hub of the community at the moment, that it's ... the only thing that ... keeps everybody in contact and it's ... a neutral ground for everybody too ... There's no sides taken in any debating type of thing around the staff or anything like that. It's all neutral.

Policy initiatives, such as the students calling staff by first names and the absence of uniforms, creates an egalitarian atmosphere and a sense of equality and responsibility in the students. Amongst students there is little evidence of sexism or ageism. There were numerous comments from students, parents and staff about the ability of children to mix freely in the school. This is cultivated by staff who try to cross traditional gender role boundaries themselves, for example, by males doing dishes at school functions, as models for the children and ultimately for the community. This has also had positive spin-offs in breaking down the barriers between school and community.

There has been a conscious effort to incorporate Aboriginal culture in the school's programs. Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) funding was used to aid Indigenous students but has intentionally been allowed to lapse over the last few years, as it is considered superfluous and a potential source of division and exploitation.

Meander Primary School has what some have described as a progressive and relatively stable School Council, being one of the first in Tasmania to have a parent on the staff selection panel. The Council comprises four school staff (including the Principal), two parent members representing the whole parent body, and two P & F representatives. The workings of the School Council reflect equality and inclusiveness, and the relationship between the Council and Principal is based on openness, trust and respect, as the following parent member of the School Council explains:

(The School Council) has worked really well in this school because ... there's a heap of transparencies, nothing's hidden, everything was available and (the Principal) was easy to work with, and values people's opinions and experiences, so there wasn't ... a power hierarchy in the School Council, so if you come to a meeting, it's very round table and everyone has equal powers.

## **How does the school contribute to the community?**

### **The school as a technology and communications centre**

In January 1998, the Meander Community Online Access Centre was set up in what had, up to then, been the Principal's office in the former residence at Meander Primary School. Overall, the timing of the initiative was good, as the Education Department was encouraging the development of technology in schools. However, the story of the Online Access Centre is far more than one of just being in the right place at the right time. It is one of a close, reciprocal partnership between school and community, and of enthusiastic and committed leadership dedicated to meeting the needs of a small rural community. The key mover was a resident and parent with IT skills. He was relief-

teaching at Meander Primary when the opportunity arose for the establishment of a second Online Centre in conjunction with the Deloraine Online Centre at the Deloraine Library. He had become aware of a lack of facilities for factual research information at the local and school libraries in Deloraine.

Initial funding for the project came from the Regional Telecommunications Development Fund, a State Government initiative based on a Canadian model, which provided the hardware (three computers, a scanner and a printer) and ISD line, but no paid staff. In September 1998 the initiator of the Centre was employed as part-time coordinator, enabling him to be paid for the work he had previously been doing voluntarily. His position was funded by the Education Networks Australia (EdNA) Community Access to IT Through Schools Pilot Project.

As the initiator was also chair of the School Council, his credibility within that group and his enthusiasm for the project were key factors in securing staff and parental support for the Centre. The Principal enthusiastically gave practical support to the idea, offering the use of his office:

... well the key mover was [name] ... and it was at the time when the previous Government were looking at their directions and looking at [IT] and [the initiator] could see the value in that because he had experience with the State Library and at the University and so on, was relatively new to the area and ... he prepared this whole submission about why we should do it and I said well do it, you don't have to convince me, let's do it.

The management committee comprises a mix of community, parent and staff members covering a range of business, education, Arts, farming and conservation interests. In addition to accommodation, heating, lighting, power and telecommunications, the school provides administrative support and some staff support for the Centre, and subsidises expendable items like printer paper and cartridges—in-kind support estimated by the coordinator to be worth \$45–50 000 pa to the Centre.

The Online Centre, as the first school-based centre in Tasmania, has become a source of pride for the community. The benefits to the community and school of having such a centre are manifold. The introduction of the GST has made it essential for farmers and other rural businesses to develop computer skills to cope with the additional record keeping required.<sup>4</sup> The Centre has brought into the school people who would not otherwise have contemplated accessing computers, and given them skills to cope with change and to use it to their benefit. It has achieved this by providing regular training sessions and 24-hour/seven day a week access, with flexible backup support from the coordinator:

I think the Access Centre ... actually helped people come to something new and different at their own pace and at their own time ... and I think what's happening now is that, when something else new comes along the walls are still going up but they're a bit lower each time, because they've already faced a completely new thing and they've handled it all right.

It is estimated that 60 per cent of parents have been through a training session at the Centre since it opened, and a number have been involved on the management committee. There has been a rapid increase in the community use of the facilities for all aspects of computer and Internet use since its inception, with 145 registered users in May 1999 (MCAC 1999). Initially, along with the 'new settlers', it was the female partners from farm businesses who seized the opportunity to learn the skills, as traditionally they are the people who have kept the books and paid the accounts (MCAC 1999). Gradually the male partners from farm businesses began to use the Online Access Centre. Some, like the male agricultural contractor described by his wife in the following extract, had a long-

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<sup>4</sup> The ABS survey *Household Use of IT, Australia, 1999* (Cat. No. 8146.0) showed that in March 1999, Tasmania had the lowest household use of computers (41%) and the Internet (18%) of all States and Territories. By comparison at the same time the ABS survey *Use of IT on Farms, Australia* (Cat. No. 8150.0) showed Tasmania had the highest percentage of farms using the Internet (21.7%), the highest increase (March 98–99) in farms (EVAO > \$5,000) using a computer (a 35.9% increase to 48.7% users) and the second highest increase in farms using the Internet (76.3% increase) of all States and Territories.

standing dislike of school because of their own childhood experiences. Having the Online Centre so readily accessible has helped such people overcome this barrier, as one parent explains:

[The course] covers ... anything to do with computers ... It goes from 9 in the morning till 3 in the afternoon, so basically they are back at school, one day per week. So yeah he's really enjoying it and he's someone who hated school anyway, hardly ever went, and he's having a ball so that's good.

To publicise the Centre, and to encourage and support community members to feel comfortable entering the school and using the Online Access Centre, the school has offered Access Centre Open Days, school tours with a cup of tea on election polling days, and a major IT Expo.

Several local businesses have now embraced the technology to market products such as agricultural inventions or stud cattle in a web site (MCAC 1999), or to research agricultural and landcare methods. Some have gone on to buy their own computers, while still calling on the coordinator for technical support should a problem arise.

There is a regular homework group for secondary students, and other community members have used the facility to undertake secondary or tertiary studies by distance education. One secondary student noted that the practical limitations of solar power at home make use of the Centre essential. For a Bachelor of Nursing student, the Centre saved her long trips to Launceston, gave her computer training, affordable Internet access, a pleasant and private workplace available at all hours, fitting in with her shift work, and with IT and office backup when needed. With this support she gained her degree and was accepted into the Graduate Program:

Yeah I just think if I hadn't stumbled on to it, if you like, my time at Uni would have been a lot more stressful, so by using it has alleviated a lot of the stress. Because ... of the equipment that is there, everything ... flowed a lot easier, it made my life a lot easier.

With the Online Access Centre so reliant on the input and enthusiasm of one person, the coordinator, there could be some concern about its ongoing viability should that person move on. With that in mind, the coordinator commented on the need for procedures to be put in place to ensure the Centre's future:

If you do that it fails, you fail ... as a leader if you set something up, and it just falls to bits when you go. You've got to set it up so that it will continue ... and I think getting it under the wing of the school is the way to do that. Personnel will change, interests will change but as long as it's always there, there's money coming in to support it, then the school will look after it.

### **The school as an environment centre**

There are three separate Landcare groups in the Meander area. Each group has a different and often deeply opposed philosophical base, but all focus on the major problem areas of rivercare, weed control, and land use practices. Despite their differences, all groups have shared resources and skills with the school to achieve their objectives. Students and Landcare groups have been involved with water testing, seed collecting, tree raising and planting in community areas such as the school grounds, fire station, recycling area and river banks, recycling waste at school incorporating a worm farm, and raising biological control agents such as dung beetles for release on farms.

As well as the direct environmental benefits to the community, the greater awareness of their immediate environment and of alternative ways of looking at land management issues is fed by the students back to their families. Some Landcare meetings are held at the school, Landcare groups use the Online Access Centre to do research, inform the public through web sites or use digital mapping software to check on catchment management practices, and use the glasshouse to raise seedlings. This enables the school to use the local environment as curriculum and to broaden the students' range of contacts. As one older Landcare member noted:

... the school needs to have people coming in from outside with this expertise because you can't have your school ... like it used to be when I was a kid, the four walls, you and the teacher and the

teacher was like a God ... The teacher ... brings the world to you really, and even though it's just down the road, you know, you're opening up the school. I think that's why it's important and that's what you get out of it.

One project illustrates the role of the school in breaking down the divisions within the community and building trust. One Landcare group acquired funding for a glasshouse to be used for raising tree seedlings for regeneration and erosion control. The glasshouse sat neglected on private land until a member of the Landcare group decided to contact the school to see if it could be of any use there. As with other initiatives, the Principal immediately welcomed the idea and facilitated its implementation, as the Landcare representative explains:

I just finally decided to just write a letter and [the Principal] you know wrote straight back and rang me up and said sure you know do it. And then the school laid the slab down there and some of the parents who are also in the other Landcare group ... were there as well so it was a real community thing.

Having the school as a community environmental resource has brought a wider range of people into the school. It has helped to foster intergenerational trust between older community members and those without direct connections with the school, as they develop common interests with the students. It has also helped to break down the barriers between different community groups by building trust through a common interest on common ground.

### **The school as a centre for the Arts**

The Meander community is renowned for its focus on visual and performing arts. Meander Primary has cultivated this abundant local skills base to the benefit of the school and community, without restricting involvement to those with formal teacher training. Priorities for each year's curriculum focus are assessed by an annual questionnaire to parents and are adjusted to suit the interests and needs of the student cohort at that particular time. If parents have a special skill or interest then an idea may be put formally through the School Council, or informally to the Principal, and the project initiated.

The school has run a formal artist-in-residence project for a number of years. This was initiated by the current Principal who saw the talent of local artists, some of whom were parents, as a potential curriculum resource. For some years the school had run a weekly arts and crafts afternoon allowing for participation from the community. In 1999, this was revived and broadened as parents, teachers and community members with particular areas of expertise lobbied the School Council to have it reintroduced to redress the perceived imbalance toward 'sports and computers'. Again the school was the centre of a project that broke down the divide between the two groups, or as one teacher says, it helped by 'breaking down that them and us attitude'.

Other examples of the school fostering the Arts include the employment of local musicians to teach as part of the curriculum, and the use of school facilities by these musicians for private tuition during school time, to help parents and children overcome the difficulty of having to travel large distances for tuition. On the basis of Meander Primary School's reputation both within Tasmania and nationally, and as a result of publicity gained through the school's web page, the ABC asked Meander Primary choir to take part in its Millennium New Year's Eve program to be transmitted worldwide. A choir organised by a musician parent and a staff member sang a song composed by the students.

In addition, the school has for some years had a strong dramatic focus, and together with talented local community members, has written, produced and performed in plays for a variety of audiences and in a variety of venues. A community member explains:

That's one of the real positives of the school and the community is that one, they've got the guts and the creativity to take those projects on and two, when they do, there is the support there and the skill there to help them make it work.

In 1991, the Principal at the time initiated the writing and publication of a community history to celebrate the school's centenary. There are now plans to publish it on the Internet through the Online Centre. The skills learned and the pride instilled as school and community worked together on this project went far beyond the boundaries of the school. This activity, like so many other school-initiated activities, broke down the barriers and brought the people together through a greater understanding of the community's history.

For the children, participation in these activities has given them enormous self-confidence, which has carried through to future activities in the wider community. For some of the artists and community members involved, it has also given them confidence to take their skills into the broader community because they are given the freedom to work independently with a receptive group of children. As the Principal noted about the artists involved 'they tend to look at us as the guinea pigs and they try out things here and then ... more globally'. From these projects, the community gains in pride in its achievements and a cultural richness that makes life richer for all.

## **Discussion**

### **Nature and extent of the school's contribution to the community**

The examples discussed above illustrate the many and varied ways that a small primary school can contribute extensively to the material, social and cultural wellbeing of a rural community. The Online Access Centre provides education in information technology and Internet use for community members of all ages and skill levels. Skills gained are used for business (agricultural and other), career, academic and personal development. The school's Arts programs provide cultural enrichment for the community and an opportunity for local artists to try out and develop their skills before taking them out to a wider audience. Environmental programs provide education, increased awareness and the facilities to implement activities which protect and improve the quality of the natural and agricultural rural environment. As a community resource hub the school provides these and other facilities and resources that would not otherwise be available for the use of the general community. Socially, through fairs, dances, performances and day-to-day activities the school is the common meeting place for members of a diverse group of people with widely differing and sometimes conflicting views. As such, it has built trust, mutual understanding and respect for others. Without the school, there would be no 'community' as such at Meander, as one long-term resident and member of staff explains:

... hypothetically I couldn't even visualise (Meander) without the school ... I'd say that the school is the hub of the whole community ...

### **Leadership issues: Key players and their roles**

The conscious blurring of the divide between school and community has served to embed Meander Primary School into the community. This case study illustrates how the level and extent of community involvement in school activities is influenced by the open and democratic nature of leadership processes in the school. In particular, it illustrates the importance of the Principal's role in creating and maintaining an atmosphere of openness, inclusiveness and equality.

Two key factors in relation to school leadership have played, and continue to play, an important role in strengthening the school-community partnership: the Principal's accessibility to all, and the receptiveness of the Principal and school staff to new ideas. In a school in which organisational structure is characterised by relative informality and equality rather than strict formality and hierarchy, one of the benefits for community members is the accessibility of the Principal, either at school or after school hours, either informally or formally through organised meetings. The open door policy of the school, which encourages and welcomes all community members, facilitates accessibility not only to the Principal but to other staff members as well. Once community members have taken the first step through the door, they can be assured that their ideas will be listened to.



This receptiveness to new ideas extends beyond the Principal, to the school community in general. If community members have an idea or project in mind and need support for it, they turn automatically to the school first. This is illustrated in the planning of the Online Access Centre, which would have been unlikely to come to fruition without strong support from the Principal, School Council and, after some discussion, from school staff. The willingness of the school to try out new ideas by working in close partnership with community members extends far beyond the use of physical facilities, to the development of ideas about curriculum and the role of the school in the community. It also extends to a strongly held belief that learning is a reciprocal relationship between individuals and between school and community, and that the role of teacher is not confined to those people with the 'bit of paper'. This is illustrated in the extensive Arts program offered through the school in partnership with talented local artists and craftspeople, which provides a wide range of benefits to children and adults, as well as to the whole community.

Coupled with the receptiveness of the school to new ideas and its willingness to foster leadership potential amongst children and community members, is the presence in the community of a number of key people with varied interests who are able to see, create or facilitate opportunities for school and community to work together. In terms of initiating leadership within the community, Meander is rich. The influx of 'new settlers' into Meander has been a key part of bringing new ideas and ways of doing things into the community. In a number of cases, these people have played a key role in initiating projects of benefit to both school and community, such as the Online Access Centre, and the development of close links between the school and the various environmental groups in the region. In addition, a number of these people represent the community on the School Council. What these people have in common is their level of enthusiasm, willingness to utilise their skills and knowledge for the good of the community, and extensive links and networks both within and outside the community. In many cases, these people have multiple and overlapping roles within the school and community. For example, the initiator and coordinator of the Online Access Centre has school links (teacher and parent), local community links (President of the School Council, hobby farmer, environmental group member), and wider external links (State Library and University connections). These multiple links allow the coordinator to further strengthen the partnership between school and community. In addition, because of his multiple roles he has credibility within a number of community groups, which enables him to play a key role in mediating the change process in this small rural community.

In a community which is not used to 'being told what to do' by those from outside, not surprisingly the School Council plays an important role in determining the best way to assess and meet the needs of its children. This is illustrated, for example, in the School Council calling for an increased focus on the Arts in order to balance what was perceived to be an imbalance in the curriculum in favour of sports and computing. The Principal and staff can also be confident that they have the tacit support of the local community for policy initiatives they take, because of the mutual and reciprocal trust built up over the years:

I suppose that's one of the roles I have to do in the leadership role is to sort out all the rubbish and I tend to do that and say well you know I can tell you all about this and we can go through that process or you can rely on me as the educational leader to say well you know in my professional opinion I think we ought to be focussing on this area and not so much on this. And you know if my judgement is found to be wanting in the future then I'll accept responsibility for that. And I think people are quite happy with that.

The Principal actively encourages this shared leadership of the school by the community. The result, as illustrated in this case study, is a close-knit school which both supports, and in turn is supported by, its community.

## **Other influencing factors**

### ***Within the school and community***

Aside from the leadership issues in relation to school and community, there are a number of other factors which influence the nature and extent of Meander Primary School's contributions to the

community. This section will discuss two of these factors, which were recurring themes in many of the interviews: the physical school infrastructure, and the role of conflict within the community.

The imaginative use of the school's unique physical infrastructure, its historic collection of school buildings, has served to build community social capital along with a strong feeling of continuity and sense of the past. Some years ago when the District Superintendent wanted to remove these buildings and replace them with a low-maintenance structure, the Principal at the time, as a member of the National Trust, had the buildings listed by that body. The school community pulled together to put time and money into restoring the old buildings which have since become the pride of the community and a home for the Online Access Centre.

The role of conflict has been pivotal in the Meander community. Negative outcomes are an ongoing bitterness and easily revived core division in the community, that have been hard for people to overcome in their day-to-day relationships with one another. Nevertheless, the conflict has had some surprising positive outcomes for the school and the community. For the school, the conscious and intentional policy of building tolerance of diversity and breaking down prejudice has created for the school and staff a position of high esteem, respect and active support from all groups in the community. The general hope expressed by many respondents is that the barriers in the community will be broken down by the children, through their relationships with one another.

There is also a belief that diversity in the community, and the school's role in fostering tolerance of this diversity, has had the positive effect of forcing people to assess their accepted set of beliefs, broadening people's outlook and experiences, and making Meander a culturally richer community: This belief is typified by the following comment from a community member:

I have come to the view that there are positives in that, in that I think that conflict causes debate and although not everybody is happy with the outcome of that debate, at least it gets people talking and lets them understand how other people think or in fact quite often how other people don't think, challenges them to come to terms with that I suppose.

### ***Outside the control of the school and community***

Three issues largely outside the direct control of the school and community are size of the school and community, availability and prudent use of financial resources, and the impact of government policies. Each has had an effect on the partnership between school and community.

Many of those interviewed noted that the smallness of the school allowed it to enjoy a level of informality in terms of organisational structure and interpersonal relationships between students and staff, and between staff and community members, that would not be possible in a larger school. In a small school, roles are not strictly defined and frequently overlap. This gives the Principal and staff a broader view and different perspective of the school and community, and the community of them, and assists in breaking down barriers. However, smallness of the school and community can also be a problem. A concern in a number of small rural communities, including Meander, is that of an insufficient population base to meet the community's leadership needs. Despite the fact that the Meander Primary School has played a major role in empowering others to participate in the leadership process, the community itself relies on a very small number of people to undertake these roles. When key leaders leave the community it is not always easy to fill the gap.

This case study illustrates how the school and its leadership might play a vital role in the sustainability of certain community initiatives. The case of the Online Access Centre is a good illustration of this. The future of the Centre depends on both adequate financial resources as well as continued leadership. It has been suggested that the future of the Centre would be assured if the school took over running of the Centre while maintaining a management committee to retain the community link. By operating the Centre through the administrative structure of the school, it would be buffered against changing personnel, and the need to constantly recruit others to management and leadership positions. In addition, there are financial gains to be made if the resources of the Online Access Centre and the school are shared. Sharing resources in this way makes financial sense as, for

example, the Centre currently pays public liability insurance for the room it uses, whereas under the proposed arrangement, the school's own insurance would cover this cost.

The third influencing factor is that of government policy decisions, which can have varying effects on schools, both supportive and undermining, and not necessarily those intended by the policy makers. For example, the threatened closure of Meander Primary School under the CRESAP's Final Report (CRESAP 1990) galvanised and unified the community and resulted in the survival and resurgence of the school. In addition, many people interviewed in Meander noted how their school and community had on a number of occasions pre-empted policy by putting in practice a variety of initiatives designed to increase school–community involvement. Meander Primary School had a policy of regularly reviewing school–community opinion in relation to the school's educational effectiveness some years before ASSR (Assisted School Self Review: a method for schools to formally assess their effectiveness) was introduced by the State Education Department. The Meander Online Access Centre was set up in the school, preempting the State Government's *Learning Together* document (Department of Education Tasmania 2001), which outlined initiatives in relation to forging stronger partnerships between school and community, facilitating lifelong learning, and developing world-class facilities for online learning.

For Meander, there were both positive and negative outcomes from the introduction of the School Council policy. What the policy did was to formalise an already strong partnership between school and community, and to further empower parents and community members. On a negative note, however, some considered that the mandated development of the School Council at Meander Primary School has been at the expense of the P & F, and has had the effect of disempowering certain groups within the community. Regarding the implementation of the ASSR policy at Meander Primary School, many of those interviewed felt that the negative outcomes outweighed the benefits for their school, in terms of the frustration felt at the bureaucratisation of a process that was already operating effectively within the school, and that offered little flexibility or opportunity for customisation to meet the school's particular needs.

## For the future

Working from a basic need ten years ago to save a tiny country school, the community of Meander has built, through that school, a hub that provides them with a technology centre for lifelong learning, an arts centre, an environmental resource, and a social focus. This process has firmly embedded the school within the community, so that boundaries between the two have blurred. It has achieved this through the energetic and open leadership style of key people in the community, particularly the current Principal, and by consciously building tolerance against a background of environmental conflict which may have destroyed another community. Despite the reliance on a group of key people as initiators of ideas, this process of empowering others provides leadership opportunities for a broad range of community members, and for the development of shared vision and group leadership. As a result of this process, the programs and structures developed have a far greater chance of continuing when key people move out of their roles or leave the community. One of the teachers explains:

I think there are enough people in the community now from ... whatever background, [who] feel that we can do stuff through our kids, we can do stuff through the school and I don't think even if [the current Principal] went and maybe, you know the next Principal wasn't quite so accommodating ... I think those people will still find a way of coming together through their kids.

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## Chapter 8: Walla Walla: Contributing to multiple communities

St Paul's College is a Lutheran Church boarding school located in a small rural town. The existence of a church community and an extensive family community, that includes boarders from interstate and overseas, singles this school and its community out from the other, geographic, communities in the study. Leadership at St Paul's had been restructured two and a half years before our visit. A new Board, appointed by the Lutheran Church, had selected a new Principal. The restructuring of the school management has resulted in the school looking outward to its multiple communities; rural, local, church and family. The school is adaptable and uses lateral thinking in its contributions to its diverse communities. The school farm's White Suffolk sheep stud and equine centre, nationally recognised for their excellence, provide learning opportunities for the rural community as well as students with field days and a wool-classing course held on the farm. An ambitious scheme is bringing local councils and churches together to provide youth workers in the communities around Walla Walla, supported and mentored by the Pastor of St Paul's College. The boarders enrich the life of the small town through their membership of community sporting teams and the international cultural experiences they bring. This private school, which had struggled to survive in a small rural community geographically distant from many of the families whose children it educates, is now viable largely because it is an integral part of its multiple communities. Contributions flow between the school and its communities. The ability of the school's leaders (those in formal leadership positions and other, non-formal leaders) to match the needs of the communities, with their outwardly-focused contributions, is at the heart of its success.

### The site

Walla Walla is a small community of 606 people (ABS 1998) located approximately 45 km north of Albury in New South Wales, in the Culcairn Shire. The population of Walla Walla, like that of the Shire in general, is static. This site has the lowest rate of mobility of the five case study sites, with 61 per cent of the population enumerated at the same address in both the 1991 and 1996 Censuses (ABS 1996).

Walla Walla was settled in 1869 largely by German farmers who moved from the Barossa Valley in South Australia. Since settlement, Walla Walla has had a strong and active Lutheran Church community; one of the oldest buildings in the township is the Zion Lutheran Church (c. 1879), which seats 700 people. While the Lutheran population in the region has now decreased, the Lutheran community maintains and is keen to increase its links with nearby St Paul's College. St Paul's is one of the two largest employers in Walla Walla, the other being a manufacturer of metal products for the rural industry.

Agriculture was, and still is, a key source of income and employment in the region; main rural industries in the area include sheep, cereals and cattle, although in recent years there has been some diversification into canola and lupins. With its farm machinery and engineering works, Walla Walla is a service town to the outlying agricultural areas. The region has been significantly affected by drought and the slump in traditional rural markets, particularly sheep, and a number of rural families are feeling the economic strain. However, not all residents are involved in agriculture or related industries. Because of its relaxed lifestyle, safe environment and relatively low Shire Council rates, a number of people live in Walla Walla but commute to Albury each day for work.

The Walla Walla community is described by locals as caring and close-knit. It boasts a relatively large number of sporting clubs, and much community interaction centres around sport. There is also

an active historical society. In keeping with its German background, the community hosts a heritage festival in November each year, which attracts wide ranging support from all community groups.

## **The schools**

Walla Walla has two schools: Walla Walla Primary School (a state school), and St Paul's College. St Paul's College, the focal school for this study, is a Lutheran Church co-educational boarding school. Almost half the students are from Lutheran families. It has an enrolment of approximately 240 students, and because of its reputation and its niche market course offerings in agriculture and Horsemastership studies, attracts students from other states and overseas. The local community, from which many of the 160 day students and some boarders are drawn, extends from Wagga Wagga in the north, to Wodonga over the Victorian border in the south, to Holbrook and Tallangatta in the east, to Yarrowonga in the west. The school community includes families from the Northern Territory, ACT, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea whose children board at the school.

Historically, the school has enjoyed a good relationship with its local community, although during the early to mid-1990s as enrolments declined and the school faced possible closure, the school's relationship with the community weakened as the school turned inward and disengaged from many activities in the local community. Following a school restructure and the appointment of a new Principal in 1998, St Paul's has embarked on a series of initiatives which focus on rebuilding and strengthening the relationship between the school and the wider community.

The links between the school, the immediate Lutheran community, and the Lutheran church are many: the school's Pastor works closely with pastors in Walla Walla and surrounding communities; staff members involve themselves in the local congregation and lead Bible Studies; the school chapel and auditorium are used for regular Sunday worship, and a youth intern based at St Paul's works with the local pastor in providing pastoral care for the youth of Walla Walla. In addition, St Paul's has recently been established as a Lutheran youth intern centre for the region.

The introduction of a VET-in-schools program in 1998–99, in areas such as Hospitality, Information Technology, Furnishings, and Horsemastership, as well as the study of Agriculture as part of the school curriculum, have forged linkages between the school and industry and business sectors in Walla Walla and surrounding areas. A feature of the VET program is the sourcing of courses from three accreditation systems: the New South Wales VET-in-schools TAFE-based program, TAFE in Victoria, and the Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales which is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

In keeping with its strong rural focus, St Paul's has a school farm, which is run as a business enterprise, specialising in the breeding of White Suffolk sheep, as well as cattle production, and trialling and production of pasture and crops. The school is at present negotiating with the Shire Council to use discharge water from the area on the school farm. The success St Paul's has had with sheep and cattle breeding and showing, in particular, continues to bring recognition to the whole community.

As one of the biggest employers in the area, St Paul's contributes significantly to the economy of the community, with a policy of buying locally wherever practical. Its facilities and equipment are used by a variety of community groups. Organisations external to the community, such as the Riverina Institute of TAFE, also use the school facilities to provide evening courses for both adults and students in areas relevant to community needs such as Information Technology and Wool Classing. A number of St Paul's students and staff are involved in community sporting groups and have links with local service clubs. There is both parental and wider community involvement in St Paul's through the Parents and Friends (P & F), largely a fundraising body, and through the Board of Management, which has decision-making powers in respect of the school's administration. In addition, St Paul's and the Walla Walla Primary School have developed a mutually beneficial

relationship, exchanging ideas, resources and expertise where possible, and collaborating in the presentation of cultural and other activities. Because Walla Walla does not have a public library, future plans include opening the library at St Paul's to the wider community.

The existence of a church community and an extensive family community that includes boarders from interstate and overseas, singles this school and its community out from the other, geographic, communities in the study. The school's participation in the rural, agricultural community through its school farm adds another dimension to the concept of community for St Paul's College.

## **Contributions to multiple communities**

The recent rejuvenation of St Paul's College and its move to an outward-looking stance toward its multiple communities follows a period of declining enrolments. Contributions to each of its four communities—rural, local, church and family—form part of the school's strategy for viability and growth. The following sections describe some of the school's contributions according to the community that is the principal beneficiary, although it must be acknowledged that the communities partially overlap. Many families live in the local community and/or are engaged in rural enterprises. The church community includes the local Lutheran community as well as Lutheran families from other parts of Australia and as far away as Malaysia. The overlapping nature of the communities means St Paul's can act as a conduit for members of one community (e.g. the national Church community) to aid the development of another of its communities (e.g. the local Walla Walla community), as in the second local community example discussed below. The leader(s) involved in each contribution discussed below are highlighted, along with factors that influenced the leadership process.

### **Rural community**

The equine centre and school farm at St Paul's benefits the rural community in a number of ways. Agriculture and equine studies fill a niche market in the local and wider rural communities for school studies. The equine centre and school farm are regarded as sources of expertise and post-school learning for the rural community, and the school farm models excellence in agricultural practice.

#### *Equine centre*

Many of the boarders have been attracted by the long-established equine program: boarders are able to bring their own horses to the school. The school has a formal VET course in Horsemastership that is accredited by Wangaratta TAFE in Victoria, although St Paul's is in New South Wales. The school sought out an accrediting institution (Registered Training Organisation) which is highly regarded to match the standard of excellence achieved by the equine course at St Paul's. The TAFE system recognised the relevance and standard of the Horsemastership course that had been developed by the Equine Studies teacher, as the VET Coordinator explains:

[Wangaratta TAFE] were happy to allow us to deliver that course after checking out [Equine Teacher]'s experience and qualifications, checked our facilities and felt that the course that she was offering here called Horsemastership, was very close to their Certificate II course ... and they were happy to accredit us.

The Equine Studies teacher is an old scholar of the school and has strong links to the local community through her family who are active in community and church groups.

I'm seen as a local person who is pretty approachable, I get a lot of people coming in and just dropping in and asking questions about horses or things. Or coming to stables to get manure, and I'll give that to them free for their community area projects and the church and things like that.

She is active in horse-related events and activities outside the local area and acts as a link between the local and national equine communities. Through her external networks she secures work placements for Horsemastership students with universities that have equine studies courses and with the teams supporting World Cup qualifying events.

It is just a long association of people and contacts, I suppose just knowing who to go to.

Despite the financial cutbacks at St Paul's, the equine centre has received some extra resources, with a farm assistant available to help with fencing and urgent repairs. This resource, much appreciated by the Equine Studies teacher, is tangible evidence from the formal school leadership of their support for the teacher's efforts.

### ***School farm***

The agriculture curriculum introduces new ideas to the farming community and stimulates discussion, as the Agriculture teacher explains:

Through agriculture we do have a lot of interaction with the community, through quite a few students coming off farms here ... and just the interaction of ideas and what, I know a lot of things I talk about in the classroom, because it is agriculture I suppose ... stimulates a lot of discussion at home. Some very interesting ones [ideas] come back, some parents think I'm pushing new ideas and different things, and I suppose I am in some areas.

The following Rural Committee member explains that deliberate efforts are made not only to interact with the rural community, but also to provide learning experiences through field days on pastures and livestock:

We [the Rural Committee] were able to look at then reaching out into the community a little bit too, that the College farm could offer something for the community ... things like Merino Wether Trials ... that we ran here so that the students all benefited but also the community.

A wool-classing course hosted for Riverina TAFE in the wool shed at St Paul's, which typically has 80 per cent community members and 20 per cent school students in the class, delivers opportunities and benefits to the local rural community. The following local farmer participated in the course:

I've been a farmer now for 20 years without a wool classer's certificate and because St Paul's this year offered the course to be run closer to where I live I've decided to complete that course and because it is a profession.

The Agriculture teacher, who is also the farm manager, takes a leadership role not only in the agricultural curriculum and running the farm, but also in the farming community at a national level, where the White Suffolk sheep stud that he has developed is one of the leading studs in the country. This farmer explains the high regard in which the school agricultural enterprise is held:

R: The College farm and their stud enterprise, they are taking some of their entries to shows as exhibits, like even as far as the Sydney Show, so they are getting recognised ...

I: So you hear about that out there in the farming community?

R: Yeah. I think that's great that we have people, like [name] he's the Ag Master here and I think it's great that they can get that far.

As well as building a nationally recognised agriculture enterprise, the Agriculture teacher has secured sponsorship for the school farm from large commercial companies. He is an unassuming leader who integrates excellence in teaching with providing learning opportunities for the local rural community and leadership in the national rural community with the sheep stud. He empowers the parents who are members of the Rural Committee to make informed decisions that may depart from the established wisdom of the district.

The Principal recognises and supports the initiatives of the Agriculture teacher, including building external networks and links with commercial agricultural suppliers:

... foreign industries particularly, things like [name of seed company] have been a very big supporter of us for supplying seed tests and so forth. We've got ag machinery places nibbling at us now, we've also got large studs nibbling at us now ... It's all down to [Agriculture teacher] the main inspiration behind it, [he] just likes to take the ball and run with it, so it means it's good to be given a really good run.



The contributions of the school farm and equine centre to the rural community are expertise, learning opportunities and the school's national standing in sheep breeding. The contributions are possible because of the physical resource base and employment provided by the school and the two teachers' membership of the national rural community. The possible contributions are operationalised by the two teachers' leadership actions, and are supported by the Board of Management in giving extra resources, and by the Principal who endorses the teachers' vision for the equine centre and school farm and their programs.

### **Local community**

The school makes many contributions to the well-being of the local community, defined as extending from Wagga Wagga in the north, to Wodonga over the Victorian border in the south, to Holbrook and Tallangatta in the east, to Yarrawonga in the west. The kitchen prepares the food for Meals on Wheels, students do charity work, the school newsletter performs an important communication function in a community without its own newspaper, and the physical resources of the school are used by local groups and the primary school. The school staff members have skills in organisation and working with people that are used in the community as well as at school. The following student comments:

I suppose the teachers that work here put a lot back into the community like the [names of teacher couple]. Like he's with the church ... [name] runs a lot of sport, tennis and [names] they run a lot of canoeing ...

In what follows, the contributions of two leaders, one a student and the other the Pastor, are highlighted.

#### ***The netball club***

The boarders are a resource that the community draws on for sporting teams. Several respondents noted that the range and standard of sport in the community would be reduced without the boarders. The school has a policy of not fielding its own teams so that boarders meet and interact with people outside the school. One of the boarders had taken a leadership role in getting students involved in the local netball club and revitalising it, as the following parent and School Board of Management member explains:

The netball that's just this year especially has really come along, there's lots and lots of girls. One of them I think, young [Student] was probably the driving force behind that ... She's just been wonderful to this school.

Other students and community members spoke enthusiastically about the social events arranged by the netball club.

The contribution of the school to the netball and other clubs is the boarders and their enthusiasm. The student's leadership has enriched the netball club, but it is the school's policy of encouraging the boarders to play for local community teams rather than fielding its own teams that makes the contribution possible.

#### ***Youth interns***

The school has a Pastor who is responsible for overseeing the pastoral care of students and working as a bridge between families and the school. The Pastor has initiated a program of community youth work coordinated from St Paul's:

We have [Name] working in the local parish as a youth worker, and so it's not just the Lutheran youth in the area but other youth are getting involved as well. The Henty Parish are looking at putting a youth worker in there, I'm already having discussions with leaders on the Council in Culcairn about getting a venue there that we can use to reach out to the youth in that area and putting a youth worker in there.

The program sprung from a concern in the local community about the disadvantages faced by its young people and the Pastor's knowledge of the Lutheran Church's national training program for young people who volunteer for community work in return for board and pocket money. The youth interns live in St Paul's' boarding house. The Shire Council is a partner in the project. The Pastor describes his vision for the project:

It's come from here, basically my vision which I've discussed with [Principal], I've discussed with local Pastors, I've discussed with local council people about having these links and networks for working with young people in the region. And it will be not controlled but I guess initiated and supported from here ... and I would be the mentor for the youth workers working in these different areas.

The contribution to the well-being of the local community is a resource for its youth in terms of the time and skills of the youth workers, and the time and skills of the Pastor in his role as coordinator and mentor. The physical presence of the school's boarding house and the knowledge and skills of the St Paul's Pastor make the contribution feasible. The support of the Board of Management and Principal makes it possible to not only use school resources for the project but also to 'legitimate' the activities. The school is a conduit that brings benefits from the national Lutheran Church's intern-training program to the local community in and around Walla Walla.

### **Church community**

An interesting aspect of this case is the nature of leadership from the church community and the senior school staff as the school refocused and foraged new relationships with its four communities. The church community is represented by the Board, and has ultimate responsibility for the school. The Church's major intervention in the school approximately three years earlier pointed the school in a new, outward looking direction. The Church-appointed Board sought out and appointed a new Principal who could bring about change; a new Principal who was committed to engaging the school with its multiple communities ensured that the school moved in this outward looking direction. The Pastor represents both the Church and the school and takes a leadership role in providing a bridge between the school and its multiple communities:

[One thing that] separates it [St Paul's] from others and even the other Christian schools in the area is the upfront Christian nature of our school. And that is actually the foundation of everything that we do.

The school makes a direct contribution to the church community by providing a means of involving the younger part of the local congregation in church community activities and in linking the district Lutheran community with the local community.

In recent years, some discord had developed within the local Lutheran Church community and relations between St Paul's and the local Parish had deteriorated. Attendance at the Zion Church in Walla Walla was falling. The church services were not attractive to the younger adults and children (including the boarders) in the congregation. The newly appointed school Pastor instigated a Sunday chapel service in the school which involved students in musical items and attracted families from the community as well as being attended by the boarders. While the move away from the local church was perceived negatively by some older members of the church community, the outcome for the younger members and ultimately the whole church community was positive, as a teacher explains:

Our students aren't going down to the local church. But that was probably never perceived to be positive with the church because many of the local church goers are very old and there was almost no interaction between the church population down there and our students which is I suppose totally opposite to this football, netball one where it is total involvement together ... Now that the students are doing the churching here at school of a Sunday evening ... they are getting involved in other church things that are a bit more youth orientated around the district and in the wider community.

The Pastor has set about building a positive relationship with pastors from neighbouring Parishes. There are regular meetings and sharing of services with each others' congregations; one of these

pastors conducted the weekly religious assembly during our visit to the school. The school Pastor was actively involving other pastors in the community youth intern project described above, and linking other Parishes more closely to their local communities:

The Henty Parish are looking at putting a youth worker in there ... Jindera are looking at putting a youth worker in there ... It's the school, the church and the Council.

The Pastor's networking activities involve the school with other denominations. The Pastor goes out and works in other churches and other ministers come into the school to conduct chapel services from time to time. The boarders attend church services in other denomination churches within a large radius. Their singing group is highly regarded and in demand from churches in the district.

The contributions of the school to the church community, through the efforts of the Pastor, are providing an attractive place for worship and acting to heal and smooth discord in the church community. The Pastor takes a leadership role in fostering interaction in the Lutheran and interdenominational church community and in linking the church and local communities. The Pastor position was made full time only several months before the interviews. This allocation of resources by the Board of Management permitted the Pastor to devote more time to the leadership activities which contributed to the church community.

### **Family community**

A school's family community expects educational contributions from the school. Here, we report a social contribution that extends beyond children's education. A Debutante Ball was initiated by two senior girl boarders (the student who recruited for the netball club and a second student). They overcame initial scepticism and persuaded the P & F to organise the event as a major fund raising activity. A parent who is a member of the School Board of Management recalls:

By the time they finished their proposal I was totally convinced and actually volunteered to go on the committee ... it was for the girls who live a long way away, can't go home to do their Deb Ball ... They convinced the P & F.

The committee worked hard to organise the ball in a short time. The two students initiated the project, contributed to the preparation, and gained considerable satisfaction from their achievement.

Student One: The best bit I found out about it [was] that I could do my Deb [and] that I was one of the backbone, that I had so much to do with it ... Organising and preparation and stuff ... We had to put together a basic plan of what we wanted, explaining how many people we wanted.

Student Two: List of Debs, yeah. And the little things like flower arrangements, choosing the boys' suits ...

The Ball was financially and socially successful. It attracted over 300 people to a venue in Albury. The following parent and School Board of Management member sums up:

We figured we needed at least 10 [Debs] and we had 14 I think in the end, 15. So yeah it was a wonderful thing for the school, it really was ... they came from all parts and they booked out motels and all sorts of things.

The P & F was supportive and flexible in listening to the students' idea and being prepared to change from their usual fund raising activities of fetes and sock drives to something quite ambitious. As part of the formal school structure they exhibited an enabling leadership style that recognised the students' leadership in the project, and empowered and supported them in achieving their goal. Their goal, the Deb Ball, was a contribution to the family community who were brought together to see their children participate in an important country social rite they otherwise may have missed.

## Discussion

### **Nature and extent of the school's contribution to the community**

The previous sections illustrate a wide variety of contributions by St Paul's that extend beyond the education of the young people of the school's multiple communities. The economic contribution of the school to its local community must also be acknowledged. Part of the economic contribution stems from St Paul's being one of the two largest employers in Walla Walla and a big customer of local businesses, and part from its school farm enterprise. For the formal school leaders, the school's economic contributions to its local and rural communities are inseparable from the school's status as a member of these communities, as the Chairman of the Board explains:

We are looked upon as another farmer in the area as much as we are educators because we run a very, very successful agricultural sector at the school as part of our niche market ... And that has spin offs to the community in that we would sell crops or whatever and of course money is spent locally and so forth. The more viable we are, the more viable the community is.

One of the more notable aspects of this case is that the school is a channel or conduit for contributions between its multiple communities, as in the youth intern example. International boarders sharing their culture with Walla Walla Primary School children is another example of the school as a conduit, as St Paul's family community makes a contribution to the local community. While we have noted that the multiple communities do overlap, St Paul's also introduces 'outsiders' from one community into the others and facilitates interactions between the non-overlapping sections. These outsiders are capable of making important contributions to the well-being of communities.

### **Leadership issues: Key players and their roles**

Two kinds of leaders are evident at St Paul's, formal leaders who hold positions in the structure of the school, such as the Principal, Chairman of the Board and P & F Executive members, and other, non-formal leaders.

#### ***Formal leadership***

Analysis of the data uncovered many examples of leadership by formal leaders, however the examples that related directly to contributions to the community were almost exclusively about educational contributions. Many formal leaders' actions related *indirectly* to other contributions to the community, often by empowering the non-formal leaders. Three formal school leadership structures played a role in allowing non-formal leaders to develop initiatives and in supporting them as the initiatives were implemented. The structures are the School Board of Management, the Principal, and the Parents and Friends.

#### ***Non-formal leadership***

All the contributions discussed in this case are made possible because of the physical and/or human resources of the school, but all were only operationalised through the actions of leaders. The contributions selected for this case study show leadership by people who were not formal leaders in the school (that is, they were not teachers in management positions, Board of Management or P & F committee members, or formal student leaders). These non-formal leaders included the two teaching staff in charge of the equine centre and school farm respectively, the Pastor, youth interns, and two senior students. Their initiatives all benefited the school *and* one or more of its multiple communities. For example, the equine centre and school farm benefited students' learning and the rural community, the school farm also helped the school financially through sponsorship and sales. The Pastor's initiatives with other churches and Sunday chapel services benefited the boarders, and the church community. The Deb Ball benefited the boarders and the family community, while the netball team was good for the boarders and the local community. The youth intern program has obvious benefits for the local community, but more subtle benefits for the school related to its perception by the local and church communities and hence the school's attractiveness to parents as a place to educate their children.

***Effective leadership for the school–community partnership: The link between formal and non-formal leaders***

Members of the church, family, local and rural communities have formal leadership roles on the Board of St Paul's. This reinforces the school's links to the multiple communities. The Board replaced a larger school governing body following intervention by the Lutheran Church. The interim Board of a financier, an educator and a business person, was proactive and decisive in overhauling St Paul's aesthetically and administratively with input from the school's communities. A member of the P & F recalls:

We just got together and felt well this is our school and we need to do what we can for it and we had working bees and all sorts of things ... There was actually three people who came in ... the Lutheran District ... asked these three gentleman who had varying skills. It was really positive, the strength and support that came from within the community.

Once they had restructured the administration of the school, the interim Board looked for and found a Principal who shared and could implement its vision, which included a close relationship with the community. The Chairman of the Board attributes the successful turnaround of the school in large part to the Principal's skills as an educator and the way he manages relationships:

[Principal is] absolutely essential to the wellbeing of the College and the I suppose the go-between of the Board and what we required to deliver in the field to staff, to community as a whole ... Our success if you like in where we've got to today has been in a big part due to his attention to detail ... and his understanding of people ... He comes across as a very, very positive person ... he's very pro the College, very pro independent schooling, he oozes with enthusiasm, you can't help but be drawn into that enthusiasm, that excitement he portrays to the community as a whole, to parents ...

The Principal had a clearly defined and articulated vision for the school as part of the local and rural communities that mirrors but extends the Board's vision and philosophy:

The issue that we are looking at currently is that the school cannot stand alone by itself and insulated from the community. We, I have a very strong philosophical position that says that even though we are a private school we should be perceived and viewed as a community resource, and so looking at where we are heading philosophically and strategically for the school is that the agricultural, or the rural studies component, the VET component is very, very strong here and we've been pushing that.

The Principal set out to create a climate that encouraged and supported staff, students and the pastor in initiatives that matched the Board's and his own philosophy and visions. He acknowledged the success that followed from giving leaders plenty of freedom and scope to pursue their initiatives.

The vision of the two teachers, the pastor and the two students discussed in this case is consistent with the outward focus of the school's formal leadership structures. The students wanted to involve the family community, especially the more distant boarding family community, in the school through the Deb Ball. One of the students also involved the school in the local community by encouraging the boarders to play with the netball club. The Pastor's youth intern initiative put the school into contact with the church and the local communities.

The school philosophy and expressed policies encourage sharing of the school's facilities and interacting with its communities. The Principal plays a key role in setting and communicating that philosophy, however, a number of key staff share the philosophy, including some who were actively sharing with the community before the Principal came to the school, such as the Agriculture and Equine Studies teachers. The Agriculture teacher recalls:

In my earlier days here, nearly ten years ago now we ran a merino wether trial, two lots of trials over four years each which involved sheep coming in from community farms ... we used to have a field day for that each year and people would come in ... There's a lot [of interaction with the community], we'd like to get it higher again. And St Paul's being a really key, when people think

of agricultural education and things that they think of St Paul's College and the whole agricultural education sphere.

The two teachers had visions of excellence for the equine centre and school farm that included being recognised for excellence as full members of the rural community, not just as an excellent rural school. Their vision for excellence, especially in 'niche markets', mirrored that of the formal school leaders. Students who had been at St Paul's through the period of rejuvenation were conscious of the new vision of excellence:

There's just more emphasis on doing something well, rather than just going along in school work, more encouragement and motivation to just strive for excellence in what you are doing.

The Deb Ball illustrates student leadership, yet interestingly was not volunteered as an example by any of the staff interviewees when asked about student leadership. It was volunteered as an example of student leadership or students initiating things, by parents and students, however. The supportive role of the P & F in agreeing to the Ball is highly consistent with the formal school leadership's behaviour in fostering other leadership initiatives, such as those of the Equine Studies and Agriculture teachers discussed here. However, the P & F acted independently. Even though one member of the Board of Management was also on the P & F, there was no evidence that the P & F consulted with the formal school leadership structure about whether or not to hold the Ball. This suggests that the school's leadership philosophy and style aligns with that of its parent community.

The Principal's community focus models a behaviour that values, cares for and takes pride in its multiple communities. The School Board's 'buy local' policy illustrates a faith in the quality of local products and services. The interaction with the Lutheran church community and other religious communities in the district illustrates that all these church communities are valued. The youth intern program demonstrates the leadership role that the school takes in the well-being of the district community, and models a caring behaviour that values all community members.

It is significant that actions that enabled others to take leadership roles occurred at the same time as the Board and the Principal were making centralised decisions about a range of matters including finances, staffing and the way classes were taught. The Board and the Principal believed that the school could only survive if tough decisions were made, and the staff and parents had little input into many decisions, for example teaching of composite year group classes. The seeming contradiction between the many examples of supportive and empowering leadership on one hand, and a centralised decision-making process on the other, can be partly explained by the alignment of the goals of the non-formal leaders and the goals of the formal leadership. While centralised decision making was chosen as a swift and effective way of bringing out change, formal leaders were willing to accept other actions that would achieve their visions. Although the support given by formal leaders to the two teachers, two students and the Pastor can partly be explained by the benefits to the school from these leaders' actions, perhaps the more significant reason is the match between the Board's and Principal's philosophy, vision and strategy for the future, and the initiatives of the non-formal leaders.

## **Other influencing factors**

### ***Within the school and community***

Other influencing factors for the contributions relate to the Christian school ethos at St Paul's, a degree of continuity from the 'old' St Paul's to the new, rejuvenated school, and the match between the needs of the community and the contributions made by the school. The whole school philosophy and ethos is founded on sharing and caring, making sharing with its communities a logical and integral part of College life. A student summarises:

The logo of the school, playing with ideas, is 'the sharing, caring community' and people always have a joke about it, but it really is like it. The atmosphere at the school is so awesome, [at] most high schools the bullying factor is always around but at our school it just gets knocked on the head as soon as it starts.

The Equine Studies and Agriculture teachers have both taught at the school for many years, and the equine centre and school farm are well-established components of St Paul's College. The two teachers were successfully working in and with the rural community before the restructuring and rejuvenation of the school occurred. They have provided continuity during a period of change for the school. They and the equine centre and school farm are links between the successes enjoyed by St Paul's before the decline in enrolments and the future success of the school being crafted by the new Board and Principal. It is worth noting that these two areas where there was greatest community interaction, even during the downturn, are the ones that are now seen as strengths of the school. The Equine Studies and Agriculture teachers have been leaders right through this difficult period. Continuity was also evident in the selection of the parent representative on the Board of Management. This person was a past student who had been a member of the old school governing body and was involved in the transition process.

The school farm and equine centre provide education and learning opportunities for adults that match the needs of three of its communities in particular—family, local and rural. The family community wants specialised education in equine and agricultural studies for its children. The rural community, especially the local rural community, needs education for its future workforce and leadership that models good practice on the school farm.

### ***Outside the control of the school and community***

This school is not subject to policy decisions by state education authorities in the same way as the schools in the other four case studies. It had used policies such as the introduction of VET in schools to its own and its communities' benefit, for example in accrediting the Horsemastership course with an RTO from Victoria rather than New South Wales, and introducing other VET courses such as hospitality to meet local employers' needs. The poor health of the rural economy has prevented some parents who are past students of St Paul's from sending their children to the school. There has been some discontent, with some parents believing the school should reduce fees to levels the Board says would not be viable. This creates tension, and potential contributions to the local and family communities are reduced.

## **For the future**

The leadership of the school staff in the school's multiple communities is the driving force for most of the contributions identified in the Walla Walla case study. Leadership that provides learning opportunities for others and encourages others to take on leadership tasks and roles was well received, for example, by local farmers who were members of the Rural Committee. There were instances, however, of leadership that was not successful in empowering others and passing on leadership responsibility. For example, there was some resentment when school staff took formal positions in local organisations.

The school was at a relatively early stage of its rejuvenation at the time of our visit. The formal leaders were very hands-on in their initial actions as they set about restructuring and giving a new direction to the school. However, the Board of Management had already handed many decisions to the school management team. The Principal is also giving other staff more leadership responsibilities as time goes on. It seems likely that continued devolution of leadership in the school and its multiple communities will see these communities reap many more benefits from their school in the coming years.

St Paul's College appears set on the path to a successful future as an integral part of its different communities. On our return visit in 2001, to present findings from the study at a community meeting, the school was in the process of implementing a number of new linkages with each of its communities. For example, the school will further its contributions to the rural community by establishing an Angus stud and by working with TAFE in the delivery of another Wool Cladding course at St Paul's. The local community is already benefiting from the regular use of school

gymnasium facilities by local retired citizens, and is likely to benefit in the future from the school's plans to establish a first response, on-site medical facility at St Paul's. This would serve the needs of both school and community which, at present, do not have such facilities.

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# 9. More than an education: School contribution to rural communities

## Introduction

The three objectives of this study are to examine the extent and nature of the contribution of rural schools to their communities' development beyond traditional forms of education of young people; to investigate the ways in which the modes of leadership of the school and community leaders influence the extent and nature of the school's contribution to the community, and to consider the constraints to schools being put to other uses. These aims are reflected in the first four research questions:

7. What is the nature and extent of the contribution of rural schools to their community's development, beyond traditional forms of education for young people?
8. How does school and community leadership influence the nature and extent of school contributions to the community?
9. How do education system policies and procedures, and other factors outside the control of the school and its community, affect the contribution of rural schools to their communities?
10. What other factors influence the contribution of rural schools to their communities?

It is intended that findings from this study will assist other rural schools and communities to develop effective and sustainable linkages, so the two remaining research questions relate to ways of measuring, developing and maintaining effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership:

5. What are the indicators of:
  - (a) effective school–community partnerships, and
  - (b) effective leadership in school–community partnerships?
6. How can effective school–community partnerships be developed and maintained?

This chapter will focus on answering the first five research questions by presenting a synthesis and discussion of key themes that emerged from the five case studies presented. Chapter 10 will answer the sixth research question by presenting a series of lessons on the development and maintenance of effective school–community partnerships.

## Research question 1:

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*What is the nature and extent of the contribution of rural schools to their community's development, beyond traditional forms of education for young people?*

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The focal school in each of the study sites contributes to its community by way of two key vehicles: curriculum-based and non-curriculum-based (including resource-based and event-based) contributions. Curriculum-based contributions refer to those school–community partnerships that have been built specifically to support the development of curriculum options for students, such as Cooktown's *Step Ahead* program and St Paul's equine centre. Meander's online centre and Cowell's 'chalkies' as a community resource are examples of non-curriculum linkages. Most of the successful school–community partnerships identified in this study were focused, in the first instance, on improving and enhancing educational, training, social and leadership opportunities for rural youth, using a whole-of-community approach. Examples of this include VET-in-schools programs, the

operation of school enterprises such as school farms, and a variety of other programs in which school students work directly with individuals or groups from the community, such as the disabled or elderly, local artists and musicians, environmental groups, or voluntary service groups. Other linkages were more pragmatic, such as the sharing of school and community facilities and resources, activities designed to raise funds for the school, or activities aimed at improving the school and community environment. A sub-set of non-curriculum linkages was focused on actively modelling a vision or philosophy shared by the school and its community of what one student described as a 'sharing, caring community'. The out of school hours SES cadets in Margaret River, which promoted volunteerism, and St Paul's youth interns who work with youth who are not St Paul's students, are examples of this.

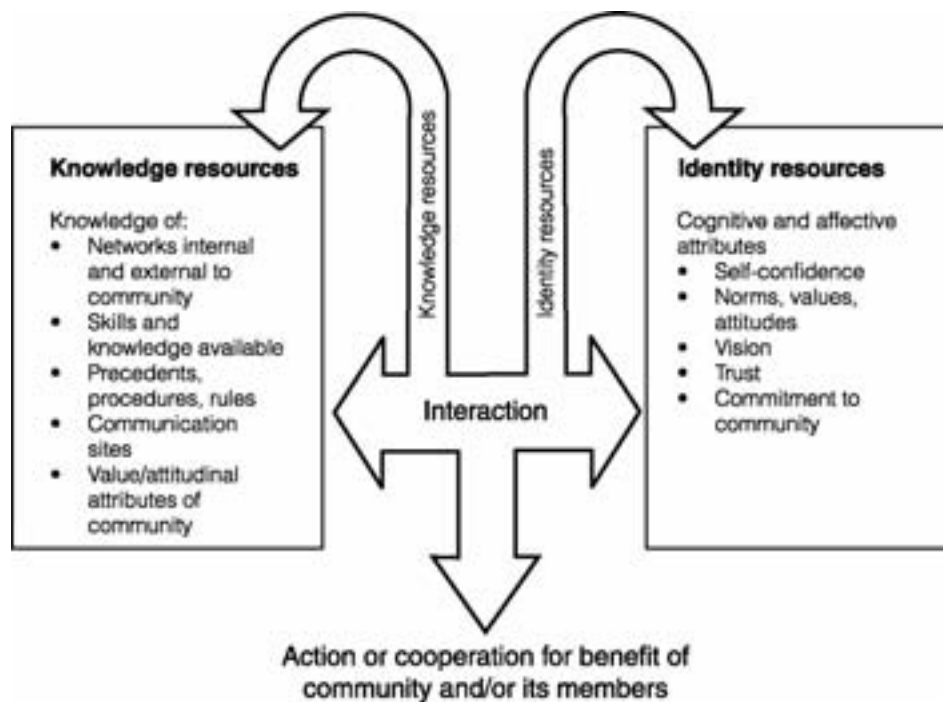
The findings indicate that school–community partnerships deliver a variety of positive outcomes for youth, and also for the community. Business and industry benefited from training initiatives for adults as well as youth, for example in agriculture in Walla Walla and through the online centre in Meander. In Cowell, the school is a major source of skilled young workers in the growing aquaculture industry, while in Margaret River the school and community match business skill needs with school-based training. Improved school retention is a notable outcome in Cooktown, and increased retention of youth in their rural communities is evident in several sites, most notably in Cowell. There are many examples of positive physical and environmental outcomes for communities, such as the outcomes of Meander's Landcare work, Cowell's community arts program and mangrove boardwalk, and Margaret River's recycling program. All the communities identified cultural and recreational benefits from sharing of physical and human (teacher and student expertise) school resources, and most described economic benefits in terms of the school as a key employer and consumer of local goods and services. These are all examples of relatively concrete or tangible benefits to communities from linkages with schools, and are similar to those found in other studies such as Johns et al. (2000), Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick (2001); Nunn (1994), Glen, Cupitt and Fairley (1992); Miller (1991, 1995), and Squires and Sinclair (1990).

However, the more interesting, and potentially more valuable outcomes from school–community partnerships uncovered in this project, are an increased capacity of individuals and the communities as a whole to influence their own futures. These outcomes will be considered in the following section.

### **Community capacity outcomes**

A social capital framework (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000; Woolcock & Narayan 2000) is a useful tool for analysing the positive capacity outcomes from school–community partnerships. As noted in Chapter 2, social capital refers to the 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups' (OECD 2001, p. 41). It allows people (communities) to combine their skills and knowledge in order to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. The role of social capital in realising human potential is supported by recent research (OECD 2001; Falk & Kilpatrick 2000; Woolcock & Narayan 2000). As described in the literature review (Chapter 2), Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) conceive social capital as two kinds of resources which people bring to interactions that are intended to result in some action for mutual benefit. These are termed knowledge and identity resources. Knowledge resources are knowledge of who, when and where to go for advice or resources and knowledge of how to get things done. Identity resources are being able and willing (committed) to act for the benefit of the community and its members. This model was presented as Figure 1 in Chapter 2 and is reproduced below. Identity resources include self-confidence, norms such as reciprocity, and values and visions that are shared between the parties to the interaction. Knowledge resources relate to networks, and an understanding of procedures and how people work effectively together. Opportunities to interact are important because they not only allow people to use their social capital for mutually beneficial actions, but as described in Chapter 2, facilitate building or strengthening community social capital. The quality of the outcomes possible from interactions depends on the quality of the social capital resources that are used.

## CRLRA model of building and using social capital



**Source:** Falk, I. & Kilpatrick, S. 2000, 'What is social capital? A study of rural communities', *Sociologica Ruralis*, vol. 40, no. 1, p. 101.

The school–community partnerships presented in the five case studies are analysed in the following sections according to the CRLRA model of social capital. The knowledge resources used and built in the linkages are discussed first, followed by identity resources.

### ***Knowledge resources***

The process of developing school–community partnerships created new *networks* in Cooktown for the *Step Ahead* project, and in Margaret River for the vocational program and the SES cadets in particular, while the St Paul's College youth intern scheme developed new networks among the school and district shires and churches. In other cases, such as the aquaculture program in Cowell, existing networks were strengthened as they were put to new uses.

The communities as a whole are better aware of the *skills and knowledge* of their members as a result of the school–community partnerships, and the process of developing school–community partnerships allowed individuals within each community to develop new skills. The Shire at Margaret River was able to call on the expertise of the teacher and students in recycling, retirees in Margaret River are now seen by others, and by themselves, as having useful skills to contribute as a result of the volunteer reading program, and in Cooktown the community has discovered it has the necessary knowledge and expertise to apply for external funding for a Skills Centre. There were many examples of the development of management, organisational or leadership skills through school–community partnerships, including for parents at Meander through participation in the School Council, boarders at St Paul's through the Deb Ball, and teachers at Cowell through the arts and environment projects.

All the schools and their communities have established clear and widely understood *rules and procedures* for getting things done. Active, meaningful participation by the community and the school in decision making characterise all the school–communities partnerships in the study. The relatively equal school and community membership of management committees for the Cowell aquaculture project, Margaret River's structured workplace learning, and Cooktown's *Step Ahead* program, as well as the Meander School Council and St Paul's College Rural Committee, illustrate

this point. The Principal at Cowell articulated an inclusive approach that ensures all sections of the community are involved in school–community projects, which is typical of the processes used in the five focal schools. Easily accessible and well-known informal ways of getting things onto the agenda in the schools and communities are also a feature across the sites. For example, the Principal of Meander Primary is always open to suggestions, and the Agriculture and Equine Studies teachers at St Paul’s are regarded as two-way communication channels between the school and its communities.

The focal schools have become important parts of the interactional infrastructure of their communities (*communication sites*). The online access centre at Meander, the shared school–community library and swimming pool in Cowell, and shared recreation facilities at St Paul’s and Margaret River are tangible examples, as are the newsletters of Cowell Area School, St Paul’s College and Meander Primary School, which fulfil some of the functions of a local newspaper. The high value of the schools in the interactional infrastructure of their communities, however, is due to their function as places where people with diverse values and attitudes come to understand the *values and attitudes of others in the community* and develop some shared values. Meander Primary’s function as an environment centre is a good example, where people with previously conflicting ideas about environmental management come to appreciate each other’s viewpoints and work on shared projects. The social capital model suggests that the extent to which norms, values and attitudes are shared is a determinant of the quality of the social capital of a community. Shared norms and values are part of identity resources, and will be considered further in the following section.

### ***Identity resources***

Improved *self-confidence and self-esteem* were reported to flow from participation in school–community partnerships, for example, by older people involved in the volunteer reading program in Margaret River, artists and musicians working with children at Meander, and community members who participated in developing school–community initiatives in Cowell and Cooktown. In Cowell, the Principal developed the confidence (and skills) to initiate projects at the regional level in the school cluster. These projects embodied a similar vision and used a similar inclusive leadership process as those projects the Principal had facilitated in the Cowell community.

Intergenerational communication between young people and other community members, which led to mutual understanding and some *sharing of values and attitudes*, was a feature of many of the school–community partnerships. In Cooktown and Margaret River students in the workplace were a catalyst for intergenerational communication, while arts and environmental projects at Cowell and Meander facilitated understanding between older and younger generations. There were other examples of attitudinal change which resulted in new shared values and attitudes, including environmental awareness in Cowell and Meander, and increased awareness of the value of education and training in Cooktown, and amongst the farming community at Meander. In Margaret River, community members reported a change in attitude away from ‘near enough is good enough’ to an attitude that valued excellence by setting high standards; this attitudinal change extended from the school to the whole community. *Trust* developed between the generations in these examples, and between groups previously in conflict in Meander, as they shared work on environmental and other projects.

Whilst the operation of school–community partnerships frequently facilitated a sharing of values and attitudes, the development and implementation of projects required the schools and their communities to hold some shared values. Articulating a *shared vision* for the youth of the community, and sometimes the community more broadly, was a feature of this process. The shared vision was built from the foundation of shared values. In Margaret River, for example, both school and business community leaders had similar values about the need to develop youth before they began to collaborate on the structured workplace learning and enterprise education initiatives. Cowell had to develop a willingness to accept new ideas as a prerequisite for developing then acting on a shared vision of its future as an aquaculture centre, providing jobs for young people that would retain youth in the community. In Cooktown, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and the school came to understand and appreciate each other’s values as they developed and acted on a shared vision

relating to the importance of retaining youth at school and helping them to engage in their community.

The communities reported pride in their various achievements: the aquaculture, arts and environment projects in Cowell; the *Step Ahead* program at Cooktown that changed national policy; Meander's online access centre and recognition as a centre for the Arts, and the national recognition of the St Paul's school farm and pride in having mounted a successful debutante ball. This community self-confidence engendered a *commitment to the community* and motivated further action on its behalf, such as Cooktown's bid for a Skills Centre and Cowell's confidence to look for funds outside the community.

## Summary

By analysing school contributions to rural communities using a social capital framework, clear evidence has been presented from each of the five case study sites to demonstrate the role of these rural schools in building social capital within their communities. By providing opportunities for interaction and for fostering networks that span different sectors of the community, and by fostering and modelling 'shared learning and teamwork as well as openness to new ideas and cultural diversity' (OECD 2001, p. 46), these schools have played, and continue to play, an important role in helping to build and sustain community social capital. These findings are consistent with recent research which highlights the role of schools and other learning institutions in sustaining social capital (OECD 2001; Lane & Dorfman 1997; Jolly & Deloney 1996; Miller 1991, 1995). However, the extent to which each of the schools was able to contribute to the many tangible and community capacity outcomes depended on a number of factors common to all or most of the study sites. In the following section, the influence of school and community leadership on the nature and extent of school contributions to the community will be explored. This section will examine how leadership based on principles of inclusivity and an openness to new ideas not only develops human potential, but also fosters collective activity through teamwork and network building.

## Research question 2:

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*How does school and community leadership influence the nature and extent of school contributions to the community?*

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Most of the school–community partnerships reviewed in this study that will form the basis of the discussion on leadership, relate to the planning and implementation of specific programs linking school to community, such as the development of a VET-in-schools program or a community online access centre or an environmental project. This in no way suggests that ongoing school–community partnerships, such as the sharing of school facilities and resources, are of less importance. In fact, evidence from our case study sites suggests strongly that schools which have a balance between specific program linkages and ongoing linkages are well positioned to make extensive contributions to their communities. However, as outlined in the literature review (Chapter 2), leadership is primarily concerned with bringing about change, as compared with management which focuses on managing change (Barker 1997). Because the specific school–community programs identified in this study have been responsible for effecting change on a community-wide basis, this discussion will consider leadership in the context of change.

In order to analyse the influence of leadership on the development of school–community partnerships, the leadership process has been selected as the unit of analysis, rather than the traits, attributes or styles of those individuals designated as 'leaders'. Analysing leadership in this way is in keeping with the direction of recent Australian educational leadership research (Silins & Mulford in press; Falk & Smith forthcoming; Falk & Mulford 2001; CRLRA 2001) which raises concerns about the limitations of much traditional leadership theory because of its focus on 'the leader'. Analysis of

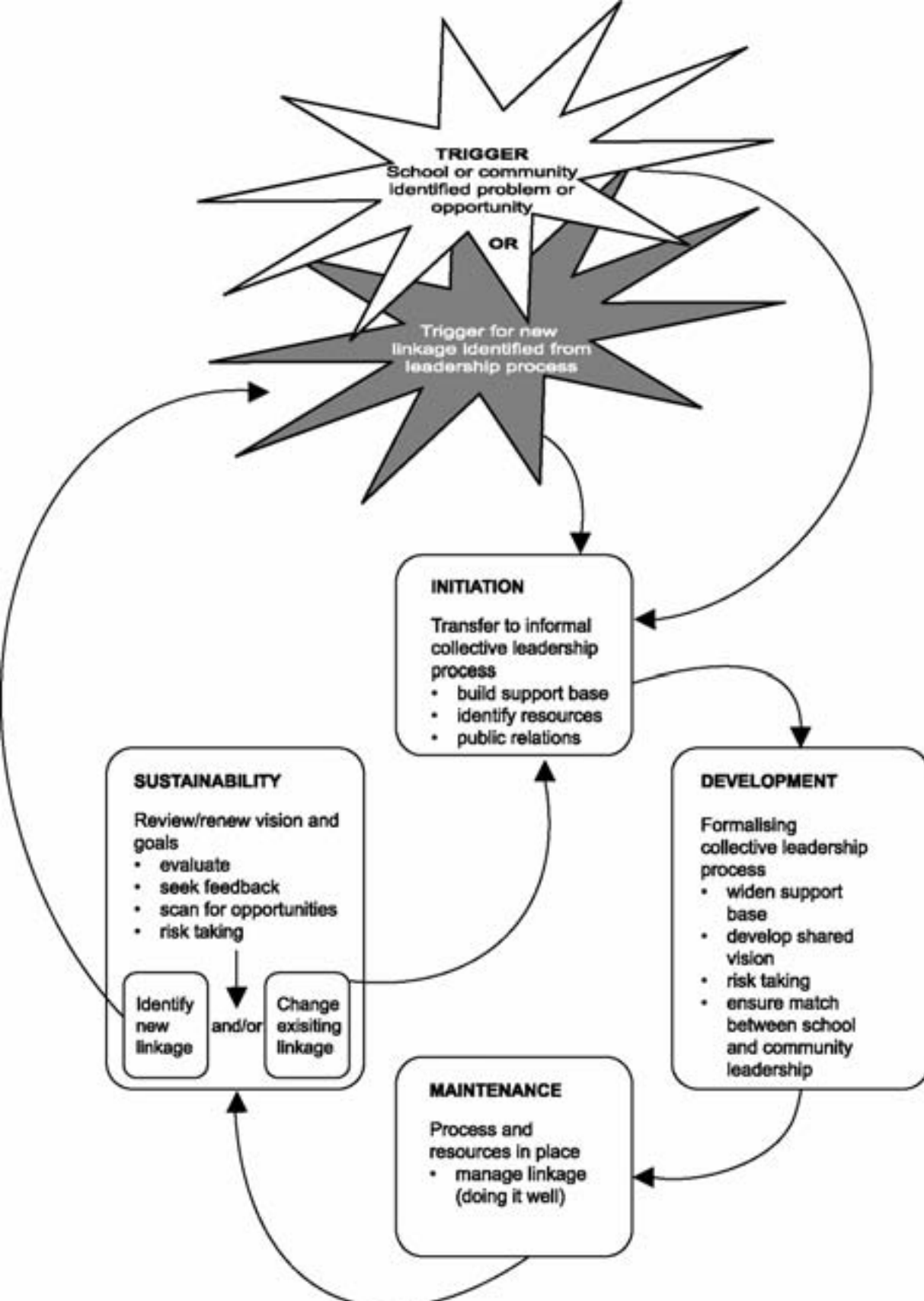
the leadership process is also consistent with more recent research into leadership and community development (see, for example, Lane and Dorfman 1997; Chrislip & Larson 1994).

Initial analysis of the data from each site indicated that the leadership process in implementing school–community partnerships consisted of three stages: initiation, maintenance and progression. Initiation referred to the initiation, planning and implementation of the proposed school–community linkage; maintenance referred to the period following initial implementation of the school–community linkage, and progression referred to the spin-offs from the implementation of change. Two of these stages of the leadership process have some similarity with the stages identified in the model presented in Falk and Smith (forthcoming), which was reproduced as Figure 2 in Chapter 2 of this report. That model, however, divides the initiation stage into three separate stages (trigger, initiating and developmental), in which initiating and developmental refer to informal and then formal leadership processes respectively. Data from this project confirms that our original initiation stage is better seen as three stages, a trigger followed by an informal initiation process, followed by a formalised, development process. Our progression stage had some similarity with the sustainability stage in the model presented in Falk and Smith (forthcoming) in that both refer to spin-offs or further developments that occur after the linkage has been implemented. Some of the original progression activities fit more appropriately in the formalised development stage.

However, our study has identified maintenance as an additional stage in the leadership process. Findings from our study show that the maintenance stage falls between the developmental and sustainability stages identified in the model presented in Falk and Smith (forthcoming). In addition, our study clearly shows that while the leadership process is cyclical, as the model in Falk and Smith illustrates, once the leadership process has reached the sustainability stage, there are two options: (1) as a result of the leadership process, amendments or modifications to the existing school–community linkage are identified, and the process goes back to the initiation stage to begin the process of building support for the proposed changes, and/or (2) as a result of the leadership process, the need to develop a new school–community linkage is triggered and a new process begins from the trigger stage.

Figure 3, on the following page, represents a model of the five stages of the leadership process for implementing school–community partnerships. It draws on, but revises and expands, the model presented in Falk and Smith (forthcoming).

**FIGURE 3: Implementing school–community partnerships: Stages of the leadership process**



Model developed by Sue Kilpatrick, Susan Johns, Bill Mulford and Ian Falk.

Figure 3 illustrates that the leadership process in implementing school–community partnerships begins with the *trigger* stage, which relates to the identification of a problem or opportunity for change that impacts on, or is likely to impact on, both school and community. This is followed by *initiation*, in which informal processes come into play in order to mobilise school and community resources to address the problem or opportunity. Next comes *development*, which relates to the implementation of formal processes to tackle the problem or develop the opportunity. The fourth stage is *maintenance* of the linkage, in which effective management of the linkage is facilitated by processes and resources that have been put in place. *Sustainability* is the final stage, during which the school and community review and renew their vision and goals and scan for opportunities and new problems in relation to the school–community linkage. As the leadership process is cyclical, the sustainability stage feeds back to either the trigger (for a new linkage) or initiation (for changes to the existing linkage) stages, as discussed in the preceding paragraph. Examples where the sustainability stage leads back to the trigger (new school–community linkage) stage include the development of school-based apprenticeship programs in Cooktown and Cowell. An example of the sustainability stage leading back to the initiation stage (changes or modifications to existing school–community linkage) includes the change of direction of the Certificate in Aquaculture in Cowell and the subsequent development of a new aquaculture Board of Management.

In Table 6 (following pages), our five-stage model of the leadership process has been applied to one school–community linkage from each of the five communities. It shows how the leadership process is determined by the situation or problem at hand, which calls for different actors with different attributes to become involved at different stages of the process, and for the roles of some actors to change during the leadership process. The way in which players and their roles in the leadership process change over time will be considered in the next section.



**TABLE 6: Analysis of the leadership process in relation to five different school–community partnerships**

**Cooktown *Step Ahead* program**

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identified need</li> <li>• involved Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers' vision</li> <li>• two teachers with conflicting views on how to implement solution to problem</li> </ul>
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal and 2 teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks</li> <li>• support of Principal for idea</li> <li>• supporting 2 conflicting teachers</li> <li>• developing people and facilitating them to follow through with their ideas</li> <li>• accessing external networks for information</li> <li>• involving community opinion leaders</li> <li>• build on existing networks</li> <li>• interpersonal communication</li> <li>• developing vision</li> </ul>	
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 teachers</li> <li>• community opinion leaders</li> <li>• Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• locating and accessing resources</li> <li>• gaining trust and support of stakeholders</li> <li>• coming to share the vision, especially with employers</li> <li>• deliberate inclusive community involvement</li> <li>• working with external stakeholders</li> <li>• formalisation of school–community partnership (committee)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meetings held in community, not school</li> <li>• time spent vetting employers to ensure they shared the vision</li> </ul>
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management Committee</li> <li>• VET Coordinator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• on-going liaison between stakeholders (business, Indigenous communities, students) through Management Committee</li> <li>• continued high level of commitment by stakeholders</li> </ul>	
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management Committee</li> <li>• VET Coordinator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• looking for new opportunities (school-based apprentices)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator a community, not teacher/school, person (boundary crosser)</li> <li>• publicity of success</li> </ul>

## Cowell aquaculture project

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oyster grower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identified opportunity</li> <li>• approached Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• boundary crosser on School Council</li> <li>• oyster grower's vision</li> </ul>
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal and Deputy Principal</li> <li>• Oyster grower</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks</li> <li>• support of Principal</li> <li>• managing process of reconciling competing values and shaping values appropriate to vision</li> <li>• inclusive, involving all stakeholders, including youth</li> <li>• building on existing community attitudes and values using community networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• oyster grower had external links (to TAFE and university)</li> <li>• stage took several years</li> <li>• lack of continuity of school staff slowed process</li> </ul>
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aquaculture Committee (community, not school, the leaders)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inclusive community involvement on Committee</li> <li>• two-way communication channels</li> <li>• locating resources</li> <li>• looking to others with similar experiences (Cleve School)</li> <li>• matching community leadership and management style (by committee) with project management style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• second, more inclusive, committee took ownership of program (name changed from Aquaculture Committee to aquaculture Board of Management)</li> </ul>
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aquaculture Committee</li> <li>• Aquaculture Liaison Officer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communication and linking</li> <li>• working with diverse internal and external stakeholders (bridging ties)</li> </ul>	
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aquaculture Committee (community, industry and school)</li> <li>• Aquaculture Liaison Officer</li> <li>• Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reaffirming networks and goals</li> <li>• scanning for new opportunities and problems related to aquaculture</li> <li>• seeking and acting on feedback from stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• publicity assists sustainability and external willingness to be involved and fund project</li> <li>• when sustainability threatened, process returned to initiation stage</li> </ul>

## Margaret River vocational program

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Coordinator</li> <li>• BEC Facilitator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identification of opportunity that fitted with school philosophy and new direction for BEC</li> <li>• approach Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• common timing of opportunity and BEC refocusing</li> <li>• vision of Principal shared by teachers</li> </ul>
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Coordinator</li> <li>• BEC Facilitator</li> <li>• Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks</li> <li>• support of formal school leadership</li> <li>• recognising common purpose of school and community</li> </ul>	
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Coordinator</li> <li>• BEC Facilitator</li> <li>• Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accessing funding using external networks</li> <li>• gaining trust and support of stakeholders</li> <li>• involving all stakeholders</li> <li>• formalisation of process</li> <li>• developing people and facilitating them to follow through with their ideas</li> <li>• coming to share a standard of excellence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gaining trust and support of stakeholders especially important because VET Coordinator was new to community</li> </ul>
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Coordinator</li> <li>• Employers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• empowering all stakeholders to take control rather than Management Committee</li> <li>• collaborative problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stakeholders have taken control and program is self-managing</li> </ul>
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VET Coordinator</li> <li>• Employers</li> <li>• Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• looking out for threats and opportunities</li> </ul>	

## Meander online centre

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Council member/relief teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identified opportunity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• boundary crosser with external networks</li> <li>• vision of School Council member/relief teacher</li> <li>• understanding of school and community values and vision</li> </ul>
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Council member</li> <li>• Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• took initiative in Principal's absence</li> <li>• openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks</li> <li>• support of Principal</li> <li>• approached school staff then school council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• established way of working, and community vision where school is at centre of community, helped at this stage</li> </ul>
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School Council member</li> <li>• Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gaining support of stakeholders (build common purpose around identified opportunity)</li> <li>• accessing resources</li> <li>• formalise leadership with a committee (mainly community members)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• boundary crosser had credibility in community</li> <li>• previously established ability to work as inclusive school/community team</li> </ul>
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator</li> <li>• Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring opportunities provided for all sections of community to use centre</li> <li>• communication and linking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator is original initiator (boundary crosser)</li> <li>• Committee's role mainly to support centre coordinator</li> </ul>
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinator</li> <li>• Principal</li> <li>• Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seeking opportunities to involve non-using groups</li> <li>• seeking opportunities to ensure continuity of management and financial viability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• publicity</li> </ul>

## Walla Walla youth intern initiative

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identified problem</li> <li>• identified Lutheran Church resources</li> <li>• identified boarding house resource</li> <li>• discussed idea with Principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor's external networks</li> <li>• Pastor's vision</li> </ul>
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor</li> <li>• Principal and School Board of Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks</li> <li>• involving Shires and other pastors</li> <li>• support of Board and Principal</li> <li>• supporting people and facilitating them to follow through with their ideas</li> <li>• building common purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor's idea fitted with philosophy of school</li> <li>• Pastor's local networks</li> </ul>
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formalisation of partnership</li> <li>• locating and accessing resources</li> </ul>	
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor</li> <li>• Management committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mentoring youth interns</li> <li>• communication and linking</li> </ul>	
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastor</li> <li>• Management committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• expanding initiative to other localities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• resources provided by Church and school</li> </ul>

## Players and their roles

### *School Principals*

The influence of the school Principal on the nature and extent of school–community partnerships is demonstrated clearly in each study site. There seems no doubt that school leaders in the five communities see their job as learning leaders (not just educational leaders) for the whole community, not only the school. They see facilitating learning as more than an individual activity; rather learning is empowering all as active learners who share and learn collectively. The St Paul’s school farm is a place where farmers and school students learn; Cowell’s aquaculture program is a learning experience for the industry as well as students, as was the implementation of *Step Ahead* in Cooktown, and the many programs described at Margaret River. The Meander online access centre is a learning centre for the whole community, in a community which acknowledges that it learns as community members share skills and knowledge, for example in environmental management and the Arts, with each other and the children of the school. This view of a ‘learning community’ integrates the school into the community, with the boundaries between the two being permeable or invisible.

Of particular importance was the open leadership style demonstrated by each of the Principals, where the focus was outward looking, and where Principal and staff appeared to constantly scan the horizon for possible learning opportunities that could benefit the community. Each Principal supported opportunities identified by others, even if they were ‘outside the box’. For example, Cooktown’s *Step Ahead* program is a policy opportunity that did not, at first glance, fit the community’s visions, but thinking outside the box allowed them to adapt the program to realise their vision. (For further discussion on the influence of policy on school–community partnerships, see the following section on ‘External systemic and other influencing factors’.) In addition, school Principals have considerable formal power to make decisions about and allocate resources to school–community partnerships. A theme that clearly emerges from all sites is that Principals used this formal power to legitimise and create a climate in which school–community partnerships flourished, and in which leadership became a process involving all stakeholders. This critical legitimising role of school Principals is also supported by other research (see, for example, Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999; Bowie 1998).

Looking at the specific role of school Principals at each stage of the leadership process, the examples in Table 6 and other examples presented within the case studies indicate that problems or opportunities that gave rise to the formation of school–community partnerships were identified by a variety of people from inside and outside the schools, but none of the school–community partnerships found arose from situations identified by the school Principal. This should not be taken to imply that the Principals never identified problems or opportunities. In the course of our data collection we found many examples of school-based educational interventions where the Principal had identified a problem or opportunity. It could be that Principals have priorities and expertise in school-based situational identification, and so devote their energies there. An alternative explanation relates to the transformational leadership exhibited by all five Principals. By promoting an atmosphere of caring, respect and trust, as well as support for individuals and a school structure that promotes participative decision making, transformational leaders empower others to take initiatives and responsibilities while providing support from behind the scenes when and if required. It may be that the leadership style of the Principals in the five sites, which included high performance expectations, has empowered already active teachers, students and community members to seek opportunities that will benefit both school and community. This would certainly be consistent with other research into the outcomes of transformational leadership (see, for example, Silins & Mulford in press; Bass 2000; Silins, Mulford & Zarins 1999; Leithwood 1994).

School Principals tended to become visibly involved in the leadership process towards the end of the *trigger* stage, and their involvement continued into the *initiation* stage. Each of the five school–community partnerships presented in Table 6 is underscored by the explicit vision of the school Principals in relation to the school’s integration into the community, with the boundary between the two being highly permeable or invisible. Linked with this is a transformational leadership style of the

school Principals that focused on building the commitment and capacity of others to achieve collective goals. According to the literature (for example, Duke & Leithwood 1994; Leithwood 1994), this leadership style is more likely to bring about effective change within schools. All the leaders who identified opportunities or problems approached the Principal before anyone else, with the exception of the school councillor/relief teacher who identified the Meander online access centre opportunity when the Principal was away on long service leave. The role of the Principal at the trigger stage is therefore to legitimise the potential school–community linkage by supporting it. Such legitimisation is a necessary early step in the school–community leadership process. Even in the case of Meander’s online centre the support of the Principal was sought before the proposal reached the development stage. The Principals gave their support to the potential school–community partnerships because they aligned with their vision for the school and its role in the community. Their vision was sometimes already shared by the community at this early stage (for example, at Meander, where the school councillor/relief teacher was confident enough of the alignment between the online centre concept and the Principal’s vision to invest a considerable amount of time and energy in drafting a proposal before the Principal returned). In other cases, such as Cooktown’s *Step Ahead* program, the sharing came later.

Many of the opportunities or initial ideas for solutions to identified problems in the five sites were innovative and outside the typical activities of schools. Legitimisation of the potential school–community linkage required the Principal and others within the school to be open to new ideas and willing to take risks as the school and community moved into what were often uncharted waters. There were risks in several of the school–community partnerships. Examples are setting up Meander’s online access centre in a very small community where resources were limited, as well as Cowell’s ambitious aquaculture project, and Cooktown’s *Step Ahead* program which was inconsistent with government policy at the time it was initiated. Openness to new ideas, and risk taking reflects a high level of organisational learning within these schools. Previous research in schools and elsewhere identifies that collective risk taking and seeking new opportunities build upon a trusting and collaborative climate and a shared vision for the future, and establishes a positive correlation between organisational learning and a transformational leadership style (for example, Silins & Mulford in press; Bass 2000; Silins, Mulford & Zarins 1999).

Table 6 indicates that Principals, along with other formal school leaders (Deputy Principals and school boards/councils) generally played a more active leadership role at the initiation stage, usually alongside those who identified the situation. Here the Principals’ knowledge of who, when and where to go for advice or resources and knowledge of how to get things done, or what Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) describe as knowledge resources, was important. The Principal at Cooktown, for example, had external (bridging) networks into the State Education Department and the then Australian Student Traineeship Foundation which allowed Cooktown to influence and bring about a change in policy that resulted in funding for *Step Ahead*. Principals accessed their networks within the communities to involve others and build support for the initiative, and used their external networks, often with state systems, to access information and resources and identify any formal procedures that had to be followed. The existence of bridging ties (within the community) and linking ties (outside the community), as well the strong links within the school (bonding ties), reflects the three dimensions of social capital identified by Woolcock (1999). Inclusivity was a feature of the initiation stage and in most cases it was the Principal who worked to ensure all stakeholders were involved, with the exception of the youth intern scheme where the Pastor took this role.

Consistent with other research on transformational leadership (Duke & Leithwood 1994; Mulford 1994), the Principals empowered others to take control of the school–community linkage during the initiation stage. This happened in two main ways. First, Principals managed a process of reconciling any competing values and shaping shared values so that a shared vision for the school and community emerged, if such a vision did not already exist. The planning of the school–community linkage was one way of moving toward achieving that vision. Second, Principals developed people and supported them so they had both the capacity and self-confidence to take leadership roles as the process unfolded. This tended to focus on ensuring a match between the leadership process for

implementing the school–community linkage with the way similar processes worked in the community. For example, Cowell is a community that is accustomed to leadership by committee, so an aquaculture committee was set up to mirror other committees in the community in the way its members shared responsibility for leadership and ownership of the process. On the other hand, Meander is a place where things are decided by wide but informal consultation and discussion, rather than through an extensive committee process. Even though the funding body required the online access centre at Meander to have a committee, it in fact functioned in an informal way. In the places where the school and community already had a shared vision and a history of working together collaboratively (Meander, Margaret River and Cowell, in particular) this empowerment step for subsequent leadership processes was much abbreviated.

As the leadership process enters the *development* and continues into the *maintenance* stage, the role of the Principal becomes less visible, and a number of others within the school and community begin to play a greater role in the leadership process. At the *sustainability* stage Principals were rarely mentioned by respondents as key players, as leadership of the school–community linkage and responsibility for its future has by that stage transferred to the group. The change in the Principals' level of support and involvement over time, is consistent with other research into the role of school Principals in the development of school–community partnerships (see, for example, Cumming 1992). However, this does not mean that Principals had no further role in the leadership process. They continued to legitimise the school–community linkage through tacit support and allocation of resources, usually through time release of teachers or provision of funds.

#### ***Teachers and other school employees***

Consistent with other research on the role of school staff in contributing to the development and sustainability of school–community partnerships (Johns et al. 2000; Bowie 1998), the teachers in our study also played an important role. For example, teachers identified problems or opportunities in several of the examples, including Cooktown's *Step Ahead* program and Margaret River's structured workplace learning program highlighted in Table 1, as well as Cowell's art project and Margaret River's recycling scheme. The Pastor at St Paul's identified the opportunity for the youth intern program. When a school employee is a *trigger* stage leader, s/he tends to maintain a leadership role right through the leadership process, only sometimes being replaced by a formally appointed coordinator at the *sustainability* stage.

Teachers, other than those involved at the trigger stage, are usually involved in the leadership process at the *initiation* stage by the Principal, in an effort to gain broad-based school support for the initiative. The findings demonstrated that, where wide teacher involvement is not sought at the initiation stage, for example in the development of Cooktown's *Step Ahead* program, feelings of resentment can arise. Teachers also tended to be a part of the formal committees that typically formed at the *development* stage. Teachers, particularly those in a coordinating role such as VET Coordinators, performed various roles in the development and *maintenance* stages of the leadership process, usually requiring them to work with a diverse range of internal and external stakeholders. Communication and interpersonal skills, including team building and working in teams, are used by teachers in the leadership process at this stage. In particular, the ongoing liaison role of staff such as the VET Coordinators in Margaret River, Cooktown and Walla Walla was central to the maintenance of effective school–community partnerships.

#### ***Boundary crossers***

'Boundary crossers' are well-known and respected community members who provide a key link between school and community. In most sites boundary crossers represented local business or industry interests and also had formal links with the school, either through membership of the school council or other school body, or through employment as a school staff member. They are equally accepted by, and 'at home' in, the school and the community, and featured as leaders in several of the school–community partnerships presented in Table 6, as well as a number of other linkages presented in the case studies. These people, who spoke the language of both school and community 'cultures',



tended to be especially prominent at the *trigger* and *sustainability* stages. When a boundary crosser is a trigger stage leader, they tend to maintain a leadership role right through the leadership process.

For example, a boundary crosser identified the opportunity for the Cowell aquaculture project (a local oyster grower who was a member of the School Council), the Meander online access centre (a hobby farmer who was a member of School Council and a relief teacher with Information Technology skills and contacts), and the youth intern scheme at Walla Walla (the Pastor who was accepted in the school, church and local communities). These boundary crossers also played a leadership role throughout the *initiation*, *development*, *maintenance* and *sustainability* stages, although in Cowell, the original boundary crosser left the community, and was replaced by another boundary crosser who was appointed by the school as Aquaculture Liaison Officer. The role of the externally-funded Aquaculture Liaison Officer was to work with the Aquaculture Board to implement strategies to ensure sustainability of the VET-in-schools program.

Sometimes, school VET Coordinators or teachers involved in the delivery of VET programs act as boundary crossers. For example, the operation of the Cooktown and St Paul's VET programs was smoother because VET staff were also long-standing members of the local community. In fact, the Cooktown VET Coordinator was a member of the local business community who was then employed by the school. In Cowell and Margaret River where the VET Coordinators were not long-term community members, they had been proactive in forging community linkages and also worked closely with other boundary crossers (in Cowell, with the Aquaculture Liaison Officer appointed to the school, and in Margaret River with the Facilitator of the Business Enterprise Centre). These findings regarding the central role of project coordinators in sustaining school–community partnerships are supported by other research (see, for example, Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001; Cumming 1992).

The boundary crossers in this study often brought external networks to the community and school which were used to find ways of actioning community visions. In Meander, the online access centre bid was prepared by the boundary crosser who was also a trained librarian (online access centres are coordinated by the State Library) and member of the School Council. The St Paul's Pastor had contacts with the national Lutheran Church's youth intern program, and the oyster grower at Cowell had state industry and education contacts. In Margaret River, the Facilitator of the Business Enterprise Centre used her external networks to access funding to initiate enterprise education, and worked with the VET Coordinator to facilitate structured workplace learning, while the VET Coordinator in Cooktown was valued because she 'knows how to work through the bureaucracy of government and government departments ... she has a very broad network'.

### ***Community members***

The involvement of community members in the leadership of school–community partnerships included, but was not restricted to, four main groups of people: the school parent body; the business and industry community; local government, and voluntary/service groups. The role of these particular groups as key players in the development, maintenance and sustainability of school–community partnerships is also supported by other bodies of research, including research into parental participation in school governance (for example, Knight, cited in Evers & Chapman 1995); and research investigating the importance of cross-sectoral partnerships to rural community development (for example, Lane & Dorfman 1997; Sorensen & Epps 1996; Raftery 1993). The extent of involvement of these groups differed between each community, as did the nature of their involvement at different stages of the leadership process. There were also differences in the nature and level of community involvement depending on the particular project or problem at hand. For example, community members from business and industry sectors in particular, and/or parents involved in school governance were identified as leaders at the *trigger* stage of several school–community partnerships, most notably in those schools and communities which had a history of working together and a developed school–community partnership. Examples of community leadership at the trigger stage include Cowell's aquaculture project, Margaret River's structured

workplace learning program and Meander's online centre. As discussed above, the community members involved in each of these projects are best described as boundary crossers. In many cases, community members involved at the trigger stage had networks external to the community which helped them identify an opportunity for the school and community.

Community members tended to feature more in leadership roles as the leadership process progressed through the *initiation* and *development* stages and the Principals gradually withdrew from visible leadership roles. The initiation stage was a time when community support for the planned school–community linkage was sought and, in the case of the Cooktown, Cowell and Margaret River VET programs, typically involved community opinion leaders from the business and industry, local government and service club sectors. In Cooktown's *Step Ahead* program, Indigenous groups were also partners in the leadership process at this stage, and continued to play an important role throughout the rest of the process. The building of high-level partnerships with Indigenous leaders and communities is identified as a key factor in developing effective partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). In other examples, such as the Deb Ball proposed by St Paul's students, parent bodies such as the P & F, played a role in both the initiation and development stages.

The development stage was a time of formalisation of the leadership process, with committees established with community and school representation. Many of these committees were required by funding bodies. Most of these committees were inclusive of all stakeholders and many had a membership weighted toward the community rather than the school. By the end of this stage community members were collectively working toward implementing the now shared school–community vision, and continued to be integral to the maintenance of the school–community linkage. Representatives of business and industry, and local government featured strongly at this stage of the leadership process in Margaret River, Cowell and Cooktown. The importance of the business and local government sectors to the development of school–community partnerships is also highlighted in other research (see, for example, Mitchell 1998; Cumming 1992). In addition, service clubs, voluntary community groups and the school parent body tend to gain prominence at the development and maintenance stages, for example, in relation to the mangrove boardwalk project in Cowell, and the SES cadets in Margaret River. Each of these groups were important at the development stage because they were able to provide the increased levels of formal support in terms of the financial and/or human resources required to develop the project. They were also important at the maintenance stage because of their ongoing commitment to the initiatives.

In a number of the school–community partnerships, community members were leaders of the *sustainability* stage (for example, through the VET-in-schools committees at Cowell and Cooktown, and the roles of the committee and coordinator of Meander's online access centre). In Margaret River, however, the VET management committee had gone into recess because the change had been effectively implemented and the program was considered to require good management rather than leadership. In this case, the school's VET Coordinator and the employers involved in the VET program were the key players at the sustainability stage. However, it seems likely that the leadership cycle may be poised to begin again, as school and community attempt to deal with a new set of problems regarding structured workplace learning that have arisen as a result of the State Government Post Compulsory Education Review. This would see the process move from the sustainability stage back to the initiation stage (see Figure 3).

### **Effective leadership for school–community partnerships**

The findings from the study clearly illustrate the importance of widespread school and community involvement in the leadership process when implementing school–community partnerships. The five examples of school–community partnerships cited in Table 6, for example, show a process for each school–community linkage where leadership roles are distributed among people inside and outside the schools, and among formal school and community leaders and others. Effective leadership of school–community partnerships is not the responsibility of one or several designated 'leaders', but is

the collective responsibility of the school and community, and depends on the availability and willingness of a wide variety of school and community individuals to involve themselves in the leadership process.

At the same time, however, the leadership process is facilitated by certain individuals within each community, most notably school Principals and those people we have termed boundary crossers, who provide a bridge between school and community. Principals legitimise potential school–community partnerships, and play an important role in ensuring there are ongoing opportunities for interaction for all community members, as well as facilitating the development of structures and processes that foster group visioning. Their transformational leadership practices empower others as effective players in the leadership process. These activities are complemented by boundary crossers, who legitimise potential school–community partnerships within the wider community, and whose communication and interpersonal skills strengthen the relationship between the school and community.

Evidence from each of the study sites indicates that effective leadership for implementing school–community partnerships goes further than involving or consulting with all stakeholders during the decisionmaking process. Rather, effective leadership for school–community partnerships is a collective process during which school and community go about developing and realising shared visions. The stages of the leadership process for implementing school–community partnerships (see Figure 3) illustrate how leadership gradually shifted from being the responsibility and domain of individuals early in the process, to a collective or group responsibility as the leadership process continued. That is, the vision of individuals at the trigger stage gradually shifted to a shared group (school and community) vision during the initiation and development stages. Because the group had developed a sense of ownership and common purpose in relation to the linkage, they had a vested interest in ensuring its maintenance and sustainability. These important findings support and enhance recent research into effective leadership for the future (Falk & Smith forthcoming; Falk & Mulford 2001; CRLRA 2001).

The findings also demonstrate clearly that collective leadership of school–community partnerships is facilitated by the extent to which the leadership processes of the school–community partnerships mirror community leadership processes. This is illustrated in those communities that have a history of working together to achieve collective aims, such as Cowell, Margaret River and Cooktown.

However, leadership is not the only factor that influences the nature and extent of school contributions to their communities. The following two sections consider a range of factors external and internal to the school and community that have shaped the school–community partnerships in the five study sites.

### **Research question 3:**

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*How do education system policies and procedures, and other factors outside the control of the school and its community, affect the contribution of rural schools to their communities?*

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External systemic factors (primarily Federal Government and State Government policy which, in effect, allows or permits change, often by providing resources) influenced the shape of the schools' contributions to their communities in a number of the examples, notably the VET-in-schools programs at Cowell, Margaret River and Cooktown, Meander's online access centre, and Margaret River's SES cadets. Many of these opportunities were the direct result of education and training system policy and procedures, including Federal Government policy regarding the implementation of VET-in-schools programs. Some opportunities were provided by a variety of other government initiatives, such as the cadet-in-high schools program in Margaret River funded by the Office of Youth Affairs in Western Australia, and the online access centre in Meander funded from several sources, including the Community Access to Information Technology through Schools and Tasmanian Communities Online initiatives. Other opportunities were also provided by private funding sources, such as a multinational company's support for the recycling program in Margaret River. The influence of State Government and Federal Government policy was more keenly felt in the four state government schools within our study, as compared with the independent school. In the case of the latter, funding and opportunities provided by private sources, such as sponsorship for the school's agriculture program by a national seed company, assumed particular importance.

What each of the schools has in common is that they are constantly scanning the horizon for possible learning opportunities from a wide variety of sources; they are characterised by an ability to think outside the box and to mould opportunities for their own purposes. As already indicated in the discussion on leadership, the extent to which the schools were outward-looking was influenced by the Principal, in the first instance. In most cases, external policy was not the driving or motivating force in developing a school–community initiative. Rather, the schools and communities all had separately developed a vision for their youth and community, and used funding and policy opportunities to help realise that vision. For example, introduction of the structured workplace learning and cadets-in-high schools programs in Margaret River provided opportunities for the school and community to realise their vision in terms of providing a whole-of-community education for youth. The Cowell community could see that opportunities provided by the VET-in-schools program, and by the recently introduced Partnerships 21 funding arrangement, would allow it to realise its visions for youth, and would further the integration of the school into the community. The *Step Ahead* program in Cooktown, the online access centre in Meander, and the youth intern program in Walla Walla are also examples of policy which has provided resources and 'permission' for schools to realise their visions.

The three schools that have well developed community partnerships, namely Cowell, Margaret River and Meander, also demonstrate extensive community participation in school governance through School Councils or equivalent bodies. Evidence from these three case studies suggests that School Councils epitomise the shared vision of school and community and, to a certain extent, act as a catalyst from which other linkages develop. In each case, the existing vision and practices of the schools in terms of their relationship with their communities were supported and facilitated by the introduction of School Council policy. For example, school governance at Meander Primary School was very much a community affair, albeit on an informal basis, for several years before policy was introduced requiring formal community participation in school governance through a School Council. In each of these schools, introduction of the policy did not initiate school–community partnerships or markedly change existing practices, but rather implementation of the policy formalised the process. These findings differ from earlier findings by Bowie (1998) that the introduction of school self-management policy had not significantly increased community participation in school governance in the four rural primary schools studied.

In general, evidence from the study sites suggests that the key role of policy has been to legitimise school–community activities which, in turn, has fostered community support for the initiatives and increased the likelihood of their sustainability. The Principal is the official channel through which policy impacts on the school, and the legitimising of school–community partnerships observed in the preceding section reflects this role. This legitimising role of policy is consistent with the findings of other research into the influence of policy on the sustainability of school–community partnerships.

For example, Miller (1995) concludes that '[p]olicy provides the basis upon which a program can sustain support over time' (p. 13). In addition to the influence of School Council policy, there are a number of other examples within our study sites of external policy legitimising and building support for school–community partnerships. These include the requirement by Federal Government funding bodies that management committees, with school and community representation, be established to guide the development of VET-in-schools programs (in Margaret River, Cowell and Cooktown) and community online access centres (in Meander).

As well as utilising existing policy in order to realise their vision, there is evidence within the case studies to indicate that the schools have been proactive in developing policy support, or in moulding existing policy, to meet with their vision. The *Step Ahead* program in Cooktown is a good illustration of this. When the Federal Government's seed funding for the *Step Ahead* program ended, Education Queensland took over funding for the position of a *Step Ahead* classroom teacher, as part of the regular staffing profile of the school. In addition, the school drove policy change at a national level, in terms of influencing revised guidelines for funding of VET-in-schools programs. These findings are consistent with other research into the way in which schools have needed to 'bend the rules' in order to implement school–community partnerships (Schorr 1997; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999; Miller 1995). Both of these significant policy changes were influenced by several factors, which Miller (1995) identified as strategies for developing effective policy support. Key factors included building a community coalition to demonstrate widespread support for the initiative (represented by the broad-based membership of the *Step Ahead* Management Committee), and education of public officials (state and federal funding body officials accepted invitations to visit the school to observe the program and talk with key stakeholders). These strategies were successful in allowing the school to demonstrate to Education Queensland and to the national VET-in-schools funding body, the importance and value of *Step Ahead* for youth and the community.

The above example from Cooktown suggests that when school and community have a shared vision and work together to ensure policy support, the likelihood of achieving a successful outcome is increased. This claim is supported by a number of other examples from the case study sites, such as the role of the school community in securing a Senior High School in Margaret River, and in effectively lobbying government to prevent the threatened closure of Meander Primary School.

Overall, the findings provide evidence to support the claim that policy played an important role in legitimising and helping to ensure the sustainability of school–community partnerships within our study sites. However, some interviewees questioned the extent to which certain policies, particularly those relating to VET-in-schools programs, contribute to program sustainability. For example, they cited an apparent imbalance between the availability of government seed funding for initiating projects such as VET-in-schools programs, as compared with reduced levels of funding for maintaining and sustaining projects. Two other issues are related to this: an inconsistency between the traditional three-year seed funding cycle for initiatives such as VET-in-schools programs, as compared with the usual five-year time frame for the development of initiatives in the business sector; and certain limitations of the present system for evaluating the effectiveness of VET-in-schools programs in order to determine the continuation of funding. It would seem that if VET-in-schools policy is to support sustainable school–community partnerships then these issues need to receive further attention.

### **The influence of insurance and legislation on the school–community partnership**

At the beginning of this study, there was an expectation by the researchers that most or all sites would report instances of school insurance and other legislative requirements that hindered the development of school–community partnerships. However, this was not the case. Overall, findings from the study sites indicate that the various State Department of Education policies on issues such as community use of school facilities, were supportive and encouraging of school–community partnerships and provided some degree of flexibility to school Principals in their implementation of the policy. For example, the school–community partnerships in Margaret River were supported by appropriate policy from the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA) which stated that

‘... community use of schools should occur as widely as is consistent with the educational objectives of the school ...’ (EDWA, Community Use of School Facilities Policy Guidelines, June 1997). Although one interviewee made a general but unsupported comment that the high cost of public liability insurance ‘probably’ deterred some smaller community groups from using school facilities in Margaret River, there were no specific instances of insurance issues undermining policy in relation to community use of school facilities.

Insurance issues identified as either impacting on or having the potential to impact on school–community partnerships related exclusively to VET-in-schools programs, and were only identified within the South Australian site. For example, school staff in Cowell reported that school insurance policies had not kept pace with the rapid expansion of the VET-in-schools initiative on a statewide basis. They were concerned about uncertainties in the current school insurance policy regarding coverage of students involved in certain activities related to the operation of the school’s VET program. It would seem that, in this case, policy is lagging behind practice, and urgent steps are being taken by the Department of Education Training and Employment in South Australia to redress the situation. The relatively high cost of public liability insurance for employers was also an issue in relation to Cowell’s VET-in-schools program, in that not all employers could take students on work placements because they were not able to afford public liability insurance premiums. This limited the involvement of certain employers in the program, and placed some limitations on the extent to which the school and community were able to work together.

It seems likely that the issues identified in relation to Cowell’s VET-in-schools program may also be issues of national concern, given the rapid growth of the initiative throughout Australia (Frost 2000), although they were not identified in other VET-in-schools sites. One reason for this could be that the two other state government schools with VET programs offer a variety of general structured workplace learning opportunities, rather than Certificate-level, industry-specific training on-site, so it may be that the problem has not yet become apparent.

## Research question 4:

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*What other factors influence the contribution of rural schools to their communities?*

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### **Nature and extent of school and community physical and human resources**

Findings from each case study indicate that the physical resources of the schools influenced their ability to contribute to their communities. Their grounds, buildings and equipment (especially computers and sporting equipment, but notably also school farms and even commercial kitchens at St Paul's and Margaret River) meant they could share recreational, farming, library, electronic and other resources with their communities. In some cases, this sharing was facilitated by joint funding arrangements for certain facilities, such as the jointly-funded school-community library in Cowell, and the school-TAFE commercial kitchen in Margaret River. In smaller communities with state government schools (Meander and Cowell), such is the level of integration and sharing of school and community facilities that there tends to be a blurring of the two. St Paul's, an independent school also located in a small community, is keen to increase the extent to which its facilities are available for community use, and is working proactively to open the school up to the community to achieve this aim. Schools in slightly larger communities (Cooktown and Margaret River) tend to have more formalised sharing arrangements with their communities. In each of the communities, sharing of school facilities is facilitated because of the proximity of the school to its community, a factor which other researchers (for example, Combs & Bailey 1992) have identified as impacting on the school-community partnership.

The human resources available in the school and community also influenced the nature and success of school contributions. Some reasons for the availability of these resources are considered in a later section on public relations. Teacher expertise was a resource that was shared in several of the communities, including through Cowell's adult education program, Margaret River's recycling program, and Walla Walla's sporting and local church communities. The Pastor at Walla Walla is also a human school resource whose expertise influenced contributions to the community. At Meander and Margaret River, new settlers had brought expertise and a willingness to take control of their own future into the community. This influenced the school's ability to contribute to the community in two ways. First, the community had the skills and confidence to develop a shared vision with the school and to act to realise that vision and second, boundary crossers who were instrumental in school-community partnerships, mostly came from the new settler communities. However, while the availability of an extensive new settler human resource base has been particularly important to Meander and Margaret River, the earlier section on leadership illustrated how formal school leaders in particular have played a central role in identifying, fostering and harnessing the skills of these people for the benefit of the community.

Central to each study site was the view of the community as a resource available to the school. This view was shared by both the school and the community. Formal school leaders and school staff in each of the communities had a broad knowledge of the wide range of community resources available, and valued those resources. Knowing their contributions were valued, also acted as an incentive for community members to make further commitments (in terms of time or financial resources) to the school. A good example of this is the commitment made by retired citizens in Margaret River to the volunteer reading program. Formal school leaders and school staff also fostered the development of skills and abilities amongst community members. For example, at St Paul's, the Agriculture teacher was responsible for upskilling members of the school's farm management committee by introducing new ideas and practices. In Cowell, by building the self-confidence of community members, particularly those from marginalised groups such as the unemployed, the Principal provided opportunities for their skills and talents to be recognised and utilised.

The nature and extent of the community-resource base, as well as identified community needs, shaped each of the focal schools, in terms of their curriculum offerings and school structure. For example, in Margaret River the aim of the schools was to provide a holistic education, customised to meet the

needs of its students, and to draw on available community resources. In designing its new senior school curriculum, Margaret River Senior High School introduced structured workplace learning and enterprise education curriculum options, which provided a whole-of-community education drawing on the skills and resources of a strong, small business community. In Cowell, a move to flexible timetabling was being considered, which would involve the school operating a staggered timetable extending from morning until evening, to allow greater opportunities for community members to both participate in study and to lead study sessions. In another example, for the past several years there has been some flexibility in terms of the TAFE wool classing course, run in the evening on St Paul's College premises, for both students and members of the rural community.

The availability and harnessing of human resources is important in shaping the nature of the schools' contributions to their communities. However, the continuity of those resources is also important, as the following section details.

## **Continuity**

Continuity was a recurring theme in all sites, and impacted in several ways on school–community partnerships. For example, Meander Primary School's strong sense of continuity was symbolised by pride in its historic collection of school buildings that were saved from demolition and restored by the community, and by involvement of several generations of the same family with the school. At St Paul's, the school farm and equine programs provided a structural continuity with past successful school–community partnerships as the school restructured and refocused.

Continuity in terms of personnel is a key theme, and this is consistent with findings from other research into school–community partnerships (Kilpatrick, Bell & Kilpatrick 2001; Johns et al. 2000; Malley, Frigo & Robinson 1999; Bowie 1998). This study confirms the important role played by ancillary staff, including administrative personnel and teacher aides, in linking school and community. In particular, the effectiveness and sustainability of specific school–community programs, such as VET-in-schools initiatives, are linked with continuity of personnel at a number of levels. For example, attention to continuity of program personnel such as the teacher aide involved in the *Step Ahead* program in Cooktown, was particularly important in terms of building trust and providing ongoing support for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students involved in the program. At the same time, continuity of personnel provided by the *Step Ahead* Management Committee ensured that school–community partnerships continued although formal school leadership had changed.

Sometimes, continuity for school–community partnerships is provided by community members, as in the above example of the *Step Ahead* Management Committee in Cooktown. In other cases, continuity of programs is largely provided by school staff (for example, the Equine Studies teacher and school farm manager at St Paul's provide continuity for that school's VET program). Continuity of staff is likely to be enhanced when staff are there by choice, rather than as the result of an enforced transfer. Effective school public relations would seem to be a key factor in attracting staff to rural schools, and this issue will be taken up again in the following section on public relations.

The appointment and role of program coordinators in providing continuity, and in contributing to sustainability of specific school–community partnerships, is important. Coordinators were appointed to their positions in one of three ways: (1) the coordinator was appointed to develop the program from the beginning (e.g. Margaret River's VET-in-schools and cadet-in-high schools programs); (2) the coordinator was appointed after the program had been developed and implemented, was recruited from *within* the community and had an involvement with the program before appointment (e.g. Cooktown's VET-in-schools Coordinator; Meander's online access centre Coordinator), or (3) the Coordinator was appointed after the program had been developed and implemented, had a knowledge of other similar programs, and was recruited from *outside* the community (e.g. the VET Coordinators in Cowell and at St Paul's). Clearly, the Coordinators in examples (1) and (2) were pivotal to program continuity and sustainability, because of their involvement from the initial planning stages. They can be seen to represent both a sense of the past (historicity) and a sense of the future



(futuricity). Both historicity and futuricity are key dimensions of social capital (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000). In the third example, although Coordinators were recruited from outside the community, they had previously occupied similar roles in other small rural communities, and demonstrated an empathy with and understanding of rural communities and rural education. Therefore, they represented continuity in terms of their attitudes and beliefs which aligned with school and community visions.

Continuity of resources (both human and financial) impacts on all stages of school–community partnerships. For example, lack of continuity of staffing slowed down the development of the aquaculture program at Cowell. However, resource continuity appears to assume greater significance as specific school–community partnerships move from the development to the sustainability stage. This is supported by recent research conducted by the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (2001) as well as research by Malley, Frigo and Robinson (1999). For example, Cooktown reported some concerns in ensuring the sustainability of their VET program due to lack of continuity of funding and the time needed to research and put in place other funding arrangements. This relates back to the discussion of policy issues in an earlier section of this chapter, in which it was noted that present funding arrangements focus on the initiation of VET-in-schools programs rather than their sustainability. In Meander, the school and not the community was seen as critical to the sustainability of the online centre. The online access centre Coordinator proposed that the administrative structure of the school, as a key constant in such a small community with its limited human resource base, could best provide the continuity of resources and leadership required to ensure sustainability of the centre.

## **Public relations**

Formal leaders in each of the focal schools, supported by other school staff, display an awareness of the value of public relations as a tool for establishing and promoting school–community partnerships. As noted in Chapter 2 (Carlsmith & Railsback 2001; Combs & Bailey 1992), the role of public relations in enhancing the school–community partnership is critical, and encompasses more than the ability of Principals and others to generate positive publicity (one-way communication), although the importance of positive publicity must not be overlooked. For example, Principals and others within the school display a measure of entrepreneurialism in terms of their ability to identify and market their school's unique attributes within and outside the community. In short, they took the initiative for their own publicity, for example, by developing web pages, by submitting articles to local media outlets, and by regularly participating in activities such as agricultural Field Days. A number of these opportunities involved the whole school community in their planning and implementation, and further strengthened linkages between the school and community.

More than this, however, the Principals in each of the focal schools, along with their staff and with community members (for example, the President of the P & C in Margaret River), demonstrated a high level of awareness of what Carlsmith and Railsback (2001) call the 'power of public relations'. They valued two-way communication between school and community, and actively sought community input into all aspects of the school's operation (for example, through School Councils and other school/community groups, and by conducting informal and more formal surveys of community needs and concerns). They targetted specific sectors of the community not usually involved with the school, and set about developing meaningful and purposeful partnerships with them. The targetting of retired citizens for the volunteer reading scheme in Margaret River is a good example of this. They also demonstrated an awareness of the importance of dealing with image problems and community misperceptions of the school quickly and decisively. Carlsmith and Railsback (2001) identify each of these areas as key functions of effective school public relations. In addition, the schools in our study actively sought information that would allow them to further enhance their partnership with the community, from sources external to the community. This was illustrated by the extent to which Principals in each of the five focal schools demonstrated a keenness to participate in this research project, despite their heavy workloads and numerous other conflicting

priorities, and by indications from school Principals that their participation in this research had acted as a catalyst for the development of further school–community partnerships. Good school public relations consolidate and strengthen each school’s relationship with its community.

In addition, positive publicity of school–community partnerships builds community pride and identity, and generation of publicity provides further opportunities for school and community to work together. Respondents in several communities noted that publicity that accompanied programs and lauded the success of initiatives had positive spin-offs in increasing community pride in achievements and fostering a sense of community identity. National recognition was important in confirming the boldness of the initiatives and communities’ ability to determine their own futures, at Cooktown and Cowell especially. These two communities had not previously seen themselves as national leaders or communities with special skills. The people of Margaret River and Meander included many new settlers who were used to choosing and influencing their own futures, but there, too, positive publicity about successful school–community partnerships was reported to reinforce community pride and identity.

Another important outcome of good school public relations was the promotion of positive perceptions of the school to staff, students and parents. This finding regarding the influence on the school–community partnership of community perceptions of education and the local school, supports findings from earlier research by Combs and Bailey (1992). Positive perceptions influenced the decision of some parents to send their children to the school, influenced the decision of parents and other community members to become more closely involved with the school, and also influenced the transfer decisions of teachers, in that staff in almost all study sites were there because they chose to be. Their choices were influenced by the school’s reputation and/or the desirable lifestyle of the community. This facilitated a positive attitude amongst staff and stimulated greater school–community involvement. For all schools, but particularly St Paul’s, an independent boarding school located in a small rural community, good public relations played an important role in breaking down barriers between school and community and in demonstrating the school’s willingness and ability to contribute to the community.

## **Research question 5:**

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*What are the indicators of:*

- (a) effective school–community partnerships, and*
  - (b) effective leadership in school–community partnerships?*
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Communities and schools that share the belief that education is the responsibility of the whole community and work together, drawing on skills and knowledge of the community as a whole, experience benefits that extend far beyond producing a well-educated group of young people. However, discussion in the preceding sections has clearly shown that the level of maturity of the school–community partnership dictates how schools and communities go about developing and sustaining new linkages. For example, key players in the leadership process tend to adopt a more directive and initiating role in developing school–community partnerships in communities which do not have a strong history of working together (that is, in communities at the early stage of developing school–community partnerships), compared with the more facilitative role adopted by key players in schools and communities with well-developed linkages. This indicates that there is no ‘one size fits all’ process for developing effective school–community partnerships. Rather, the leadership process is situational, as Falk and Smith (forthcoming) propose, in that it must take into account issues such as the school’s and community’s history of working together, the availability, capacity and willingness of people to play a role in the leadership process, and the nature of the problem or opportunity that is driving the school–community linkage.

Table 7, which follows, summarises the key characteristics of effective school–community partnerships, including effective leadership, for each of the five study sites. As noted above, however, that the nature and extent of these characteristics differ, according to the level of maturity of the school–community partnership. The table is intended to be read from left to right and from top to bottom, as it represents a continuum of development from early to mature school–community partnerships.

Table 7 identifies twelve characteristics or indicators that are central to the success of school–community partnerships in each of the five study sites. The indicators, listed below, are largely sequential in that later indicators build on earlier ones.

13. School Principals are committed to fostering increased integration between school and community.
14. School has in-depth knowledge of the community and resources available.
15. School actively seeks opportunities to involve all sectors of the community, including boundary crossers, and those who would not normally have contact with the school.
16. School has a high level of awareness of the value and importance to school–community partnerships of good public relations.
17. School Principals display a transformational leadership style which empowers others within the school and community and facilitates collective visioning.
18. School and community have access to and utilise extensive internal and external networks.
19. School and community share a vision for the future, centred on their youth.
20. School and community are open to new ideas, willing to take risks and willing to mould opportunities to match their vision.
21. School and community together play an active, meaningful and purposeful role in school decision making.
22. School and community value the skills of all in contributing to the learning of all.
23. Leadership for school–community partnerships is seen as the collective responsibility of school and community.
24. School and community both view the school as a learning centre for the whole community, which brings together physical, human and social capital resources.

Underscoring these indicators is the importance of collective learning activities including teamwork and network building, which have been identified elsewhere (OECD 2001; Falk & Kilpatrick 2000) as key social capital building activities.

Figure 4, (immediately following Table 7), synthesises material contained in Table 7 and in the list of indicators presented above. It collapses the levels of maturity of the school–community partnership into three broad levels (early, middle and late), and presents a generic model of the relationship between the indicators of effective school–community partnerships and the level of maturity of those partnerships.

**TABLE 7: Key characteristics of effective school–community partnerships at different levels of maturity**

<b>WALLA WALLA</b>	<b>COOKTOWN</b>	<b>COWELL</b>	<b>MARGARET RIVER</b>	<b>MEANDER</b>
<b>Level of maturity of partnership</b>				
Early	Early to mid	Mid to late	Late	Mature
<b>Initiation of partnership</b>				
All linkages initiated by school	Most linkages initiated by school	Most linkages initiated by community	Linkages initiated equally by school and community	All linkages initiated by community
<b>Extent of school’s knowledge and use of community resources</b>				
Building a knowledge base; uses community resources	Building a knowledge base; uses community resources	Adding to a well established knowledge base; uses community resources	Extensive knowledge base within and outside community; extensive use of community resources	Extensive knowledge base within and outside community; extensive use of community resources
<b>Extent of school public relations</b>				
Focus on publicity and marketing external to the community	Focus on publicity, particularly external to community; early stage of developing good public relations within community	Focus on publicity and marketing external to community; developing good public relations within community	High level of publicity and marketing external to community; has developed and continues to build good public relations within community	High level of publicity and marketing external to community; school public relations are subsumed by community public relations
<b>Decision making in school–community partnerships</b>				
Decision making weighted towards the school	Shared decision making between school and community	Decision making sometimes shared between school and community and sometimes weighted towards community	Decision making sometimes shared between school and community and sometimes weighted towards community	Decision making weighted towards the community
<b>Match between level of community empowerment and leadership processes for school–community partnerships</b>				
Community used to direction from others; leadership processes for school–community partnerships mirror this	Community starting to take control for own future; leadership processes for school–community partnerships mirror and contribute to community empowerment by building community capacity	Community used to taking control of its own future; inclusive leadership processes for school–community partnerships mirror and contribute to level of community empowerment by developing capacity to establish and utilise external links	Community controls its own future; leadership processes for school–community partnerships mirror and contribute to level of community empowerment by further developing community capacity	Community controls its own future and is empowered to influence outside authorities; school is integrated into community leadership processes

**Extent to which vision for school–community partnership is shared**

Vision still belongs to formal school leaders	Vision newly shared between school and community	Vision shared between school and community	Vision shared between school and community	School is part of the community's vision
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**Extent to which school–community partnerships exhibit risk taking and ability to mould opportunities**

Low level of risk taking and opportunity moulding	High level of risk taking and opportunity moulding	High level of risk taking and opportunity moulding	Medium level of risk taking and opportunity moulding	Low level as school and community are reaping the benefits of past risk taking and opportunity moulding activities
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**Role of community in formal school leadership**

School Board representing church, parent and community interests appointed by the church; Appointed Board has total control	No school council so no formal community involvement in school leadership	Inclusive School Council represents interests of all community groups; community Council members elected by parent/community body	Inclusive School Council represents interests of most community groups; community Council members elected by parent/community body	Inclusive School Council represents interests of all community groups; community Council members elected by parent/community body
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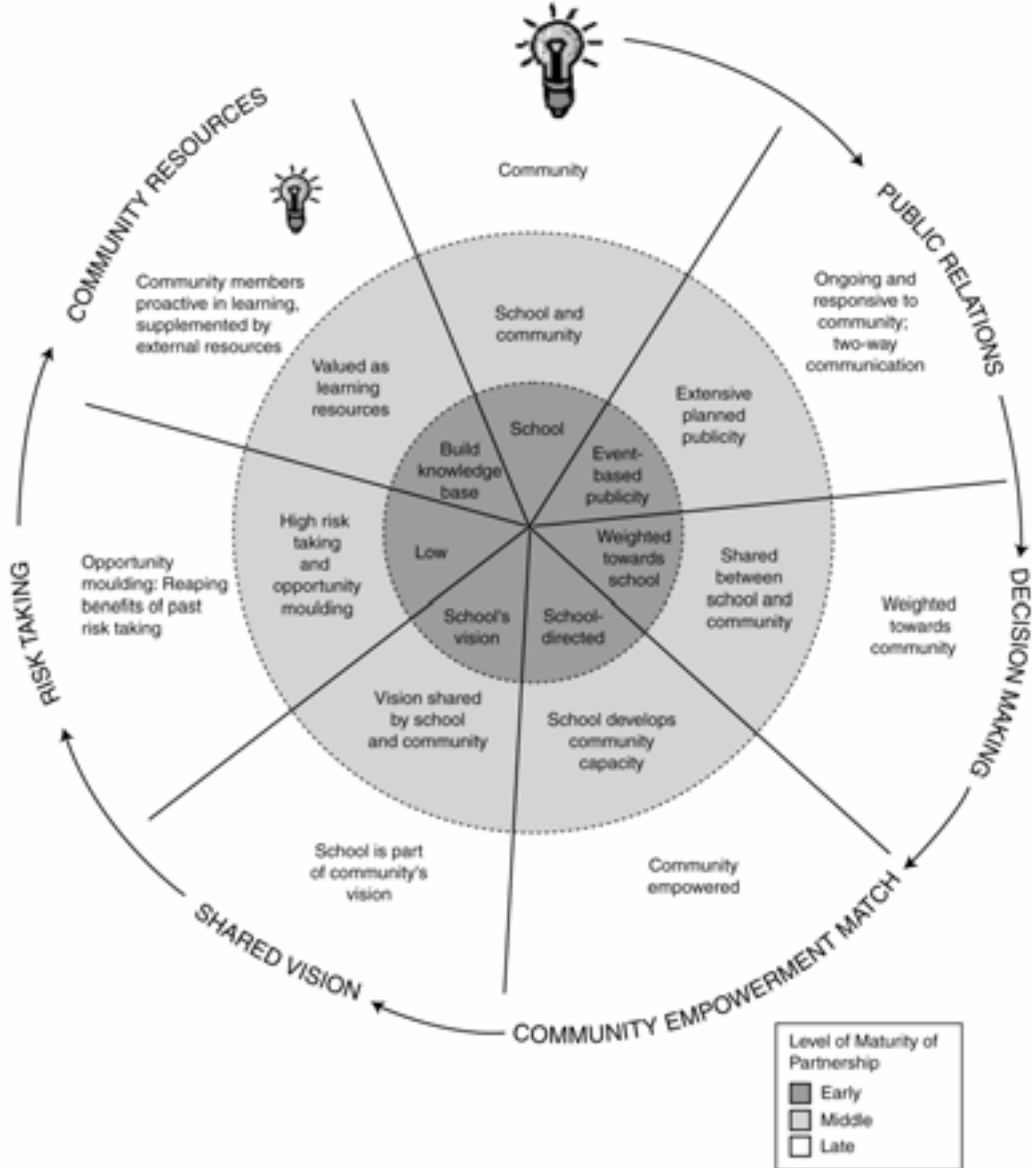
**Extent to which community resources are valued**

No evidence at this stage	Some community members see themselves as valuable learning resources	Some community members see themselves as valuable learning resources	Community members see themselves as valuable learning resources	Community members proactive in learning of school and community
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**Extent to which community perceive school as a learning centre**

No evidence at this stage	Limited evidence; indications of developing perceptions	Most groups within the community view the school as a learning centre	Certain groups (e.g. business), but not the whole community, view the school as a learning centre*  *Most likely because this site has a number of other learning facilities, whereas smaller communities the school is the only learning facility	All groups within the community view the school as a learning centre
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**FIGURE 4: Relationship between indicators and level of maturity of the school–community partnership**



Model developed by Susan Johns, Sue Kilpatrick and Bill Mulford.

**Chapter summary**

This chapter has overviewed the key contributions of rural schools to their communities by using a social capital framework. It has discussed the important role of leadership as a process involving school and community, and has considered a number of factors both external and internal to the school and community that influence the nature and extent of rural schools’ contributions to their communities. The chapter concluded with a set of indicators of effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership in school–community partnerships. Chapter 10 will draw together the key issues presented in this chapter into a series of lessons for developing and maintaining effective school–community partnerships. It will also present a number of specific recommendations for practice and policy, designed to enhance school–community partnerships, as well as recommendations for further research.

# 10. Lessons, recommendations and conclusions

## Introduction

Chapter 9 highlighted the role of key players and the importance of the collective leadership process in developing and maintaining effective school–community partnerships. It also examined the influence of several other factors external to the school, including education system policy and procedures, as well as several factors internal to the school, such as continuity and public relations. Drawing on the discussion presented in the previous chapter, this chapter addresses the sixth and final research question in relation to the development and maintenance of school–community partnerships. The chapter then concludes with some final thoughts regarding the scope, outcomes and implications of the study.

## Research question 6:

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*How can effective school–community partnerships be developed and maintained?*

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This research question will be answered by reference to three groups of stakeholders in school–community partnerships: schools and communities, policy makers, and researchers. Ten lessons for schools and communities in the development and maintenance of effective school–community partnerships will be presented. Following the lessons, a number of specific policy recommendations relating to resourcing, continuity, evaluation and leadership issues, will be made. The section will conclude with recommendations for further research.

## Lessons for developing and maintaining effective school–community partnerships

Findings from each of our five sites demonstrate conclusively that schools, communities and policy makers can all actively increase the capacity of rural schools to contribute to their communities. The following ten lessons for schools and communities provide practical suggestions as to how this might be achieved.

### **Lesson 1: Value youth**

Communities in which all sectors value, share responsibility for, and are committed to the provision of opportunities for their youth, actively seek linkages with their local schools. Linkages based on this shared vision for the youth of the community give rise to multiple outcomes that benefit not only youth, but the whole community. The VET-in-schools programs in Margaret River, Cowell and Cooktown are good examples, as are the community arts programs at Meander Primary School.

*Who should act? Local government, service clubs, chambers of commerce and other business and industry bodies, school councils and parent bodies.*

### **Lesson 2: Scan the horizon for new opportunities**

Schools and communities need to constantly scan the horizon for new opportunities, both within and outside the community, that will allow them to realise their shared vision, particularly those that will involve multiple community sectors working together. Schools and communities need to be prepared to mould opportunities to fit with *their* vision. This requires locating resources from diverse funding

sources and putting them together to enact the vision. The mangrove boardwalk in Cowell, the SES cadets in Margaret River, and the youth intern scheme at Walla Walla are good examples.

*Who should act? Principals, other school staff, local government, service clubs, chambers of commerce and other business and industry bodies, school councils and parent bodies.*

### **Lesson 3: Good school public relations are crucial**

School public relations are about two-way communication between school and community, ensuring the school is in tune with community concerns and aspirations. Schools which have a high level of awareness of the community's needs and aspirations, and a thorough knowledge of resources available within the community, are well placed to identify common issues or areas of concern between school and community (e.g. the provision of opportunities for youth) and to develop initiatives that will meet these needs. The VET-in-schools program in Margaret River, which meets both youth needs and business community needs, is a good example of this.

Public relations is an ongoing and shared activity involving all school staff and students, as well as the community. Community members, such as those on the school council and P & F (P & C) can also play a vital role here, by publicising school successes and helping to correct misperceptions of the school within the community. Good school public relations also ensure that community members know their contributions are valued. The end-of-year functions for the Margaret River and Cooktown VET-in-schools programs, at which the contributions of participating employers are acknowledged, are good examples of the power of good public relations in ensuring continued community commitment to the program. Public relations also includes positive publicity celebrating successful linkages, so the process of developing school–community partnerships needs to include active and planned publicity at each stage.

*Who should act? Principals, school councils and parent bodies, local media.*

### **Lesson 4: Provide opportunities and support for everyone to contribute**

Provide multiple opportunities for people to be involved in school and community activities, depending on their skills, abilities and self-confidence. In particular, ensure those new to the school and community are welcomed into the community. School councils and parent bodies (P & F/P & C) could play an important role here, by conducting staff and new student/parent induction programs and organising social activities to facilitate their assimilation into the community. Facilitate involvement of all by developing within the school and community a culture of openness to new ideas and respect for the contributions of all. Support people as they take on leadership roles. For example, formal school leaders who use transformational leadership practices empower and build confidence within others from school and community. The way in which the Principal in Cowell actively supported and involved others in school activities and decision making, and the way in which the school in Margaret River identified and targeted specific community sectors such as the retired citizens involved in the volunteer reading program, are good illustrations.

*Who should act? Principals, school staff, school councils, parent bodies.*

### **Lesson 5: Encourage broad-based participation in school leadership processes**

Communities in which people from multiple sectors are encouraged to participate actively in (inclusive) school governance through P & F (P & C) and school council bodies lay the foundation for ongoing and mutually beneficial school–community partnerships. School community partnership processes and structures should, in the first instance, be consistent with those in the community outside of the school. School community partnerships can go on to develop and shape leadership processes that are effective in the development of other school–community partnerships. Examples of



this are the P & C and School Management Group in Margaret River, and the school councils in Cowell and Meander.

*Who should act? Principals, school councils and parent bodies.*

### **Lesson 6: Get community leaders on side**

Identify and develop relationships between school and key community opinion leaders from all community sectors, particularly those sectors that have had little previous involvement with the school. In particular, target business and industry, local government, service and other voluntary groups, churches, Indigenous and ethnic groups. When key community leaders actively participate in school governance, school–community partnerships are further strengthened. The composition of the VET-in-schools management committees in Cooktown, Cowell and Margaret River, and the rural committee in Walla Walla, are good examples of school–community partnerships benefiting from the support of key community leaders.

*Who should act? Principals, school staff, community opinion leaders, school councils and parent bodies.*

### **Lesson 7: Nurture boundary crossers**

Boundary crossers play an important role in building and maintaining school–community partnerships, and also provide a sense of continuity that is so important to the sustainability of school–community partnerships. Identify and support existing and potential new boundary crossers in the community, and develop strong relationships between them and the school. In some cases, this may mean offering them employment within the school, as was the case in Cooktown. Where boundary crossers are already school staff members, recognise and value their skills and ensure their role is supported at both a management and operational level within the school. A good example of this is the support of the Principal and Board of Management for the boundary crossing activities of the Pastor, as he strengthened linkages between the school and the local and church communities.

*Who should act? Principals, school councils, local government, community, business and industry organisations.*

### **Lesson 8: Don't try to short circuit the process when developing school–community links**

Realise that building shared vision and commitment to school–community partnerships is developmental and therefore takes time and requires careful planning. Time spent at the beginning of the process is more likely to ensure the sustainability of linkages and the availability of capacity or social capital down the track. Don't underestimate the importance of the initiating leadership stage, as this is where broad-based support for the potential linkage will be gained. Ensure all stakeholders are involved at this stage, including students, all school staff and community members, by providing multiple opportunities within and outside the school for discussion of proposed school–community partnerships, and ensure all stakeholders are involved in these discussions. The amount of time (over six months) and effort spent gauging and building support for the *Step Ahead* program in Cooktown is a good example of this.

Formal support for the linkage, including the provision of resources, and formalised involvement of key stakeholders, needs to be sought and obtained at the developmental leadership stage. Again, this formal support needs to involve all stakeholders if the linkage is to develop to its full potential. The careful selection of committee members to lead the VET-in-schools programs in Margaret River, Cowell and Cooktown illustrate the importance of this stage.

It is important that one doesn't neglect the sustainability stage of the process as this is the critical time when an initiative will either continue to grow and develop, or will gradually die. In particular, it is important to ensure sufficient resources (funding, staffing) are allocated to this stage of the process to allow for the monitoring of problems. At this stage, don't be afraid to admit you've got it wrong. If something isn't working well, have the courage to refocus or start again. A good example of this is the aquaculture program in Cowell. Recognising the limitations of the program in terms of insufficient community-wide support, the leadership process reverted to the initiating stage, at which a public meeting was held to decide on the future of the program and on the extent of community support for its continuation. Following overwhelming public support, a new aquaculture Board of Management was formed, which represented the interests and concerns of a broad range of community stakeholders. The new Board represents community-wide commitment to and ownership of the program, and is a key factor contributing to its sustainability.

*Who should act? Principals, school councils.*

### **Lesson 9: Involve external stakeholders from the beginning**

Involve external stakeholders, such as Departments of Education and other funding bodies, early in the process, and ensure two-way communication with them throughout. Where the various government departments and funding bodies have a good working relationship with and knowledge of the particular issues confronting a rural school, they are more likely to demonstrate flexibility in reconciling policy with the particular circumstances of each school and community.

At the same time, schools and communities need to be proactive in shaping or changing policy in order to achieve school–community vision. School Councils and parent bodies need to take a proactive role in working with their schools to lobby for changes in respect of issues such as resourcing, that are central to many school–community partnerships. The way in which national policy was amended to allow Cooktown's Step Ahead program to proceed according to the original vision of school and community, illustrates this. Further to this, consideration could be given to forming a national lobby group of parents and educators from Government and independent schools in rural areas, to lobby policy makers in respect of rural school issues and concerns that influence the capacity of rural schools to contribute to their communities. The national lobby group would include representatives from existing peak bodies such as the Australian Council of State School Organisations (ACSSO), Australian Parent Council (APC), Isolated Children's Parents Association (ICPA) and Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC).

*Who should act? Principals, school councils, ACSSO, APC, ICPA, APAPDC.*

### **Lesson 10: Be flexible but maintain a degree of continuity**

Be flexible in changing structures within school and community to facilitate school–community partnerships (e.g. flexibility in school operating hours, flexibility in appointing staff to coordinate linkages, flexibility in terms of venues and times of meetings relating to school–community partnerships). This may mean making a conscious decision to depart from traditional or established practices such as regular school operating hours, but is likely to encourage and facilitate greater involvement of the community in the school. The success of the VET-in-schools programs in Margaret River, Cooktown, Cowell and Walla Walla is underpinned by such flexibility.

At the same time, however, a degree of continuity in terms of resources is important to the development and sustainability of effective school–community partnerships. When school–community partnerships are developed through a leadership process that involves both school and community, community ownership of the linkage, and commitment to its sustainability, is enhanced. This community commitment is particularly important given that school staff are likely to move on. Often, boundary crossers will provide continuity to the school–community partnerships, as is the case with the boundary crosser in Cooktown who was also the VET Coordinator.

*Who should act? Principals, school councils.*

## **Recommendations for policy**

The recommendations in the following section are directed toward policy makers. Like the lessons for schools and communities above, these recommendations are designed to enhance the capacity of rural schools to contribute to their communities, and to enhance the capacity of rural communities to work with their schools. The recommendations cover four main areas which impact on the nature and extent of school–community partnerships—resourcing, continuity, evaluation, and leadership.

The recommendations are drawn from the data and also from the community meetings presented in each study site some twelve months after data collection. At these meetings, community members were invited to have input into framing a set of recommendations.

### **Policy recommendation 1: Provide for continuity**

Funding for the development of large-scale school–community partnerships, including initiatives such as VET-in-schools programs and community online access centres, needs to look beyond the implementation stage to maintenance and sustainability. Appropriate provision needs to be made for successful program continuity. Consideration needs to be given to the following issues:

- Seeding grants for the development of large-scale school–community partnerships should have a five-year lifecycle, in keeping with commercial business practice.

*Who should act? Enterprise and Career Education Foundation (ECEP), Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), State education departments, ACSSO, APC.*

- Current levels of funding for the development, maintenance and sustainability of large-scale school–community partnerships should be reviewed, and increased levels of funding allocated (or redistributed from the ‘start-up’ stages) to allow for the maintenance and sustainability of school–community partnerships.

*Who should act? ECEP, DETYA, State education departments, ACSSO, APC.*

### **Policy recommendation 2: Support school entrepreneurship by better facilitating the seeking out and writing of funding applications**

Rural schools need to become more entrepreneurial and to access a wide range of opportunities both within and external to the education system. The ability and time to write high-quality funding proposals would seem to be a key step in this process, yet the schools in our study indicated a shortage of resources and/or skills in relation to this area. Solutions might include training existing staff in grant application and acquittance procedures, funding some non-teaching time to allow staff to prepare grant applications, or employment of a person whose role would be to coordinate the grant application process. It is therefore recommended that:

- Additional financial resources should be provided to rural schools to allow them to seek opportunities and develop grant applications for external sources of funding.

*Who should act? State education departments (including professional development sections), Catholic and other independent school bodies, regional development organisations, local government.*

### **Policy recommendation 3: Facilitate the appointment of school–community liaison officers**

Related to the above recommendation is the current and potential role of boundary crossers in facilitating school–community partnerships. Given the importance of this role in all communities, and given that many of the people who occupy this role do so voluntarily, and often in addition to other work, it is recommended that:

- The position of school–community liaison officer should be created in each rural local government area or equivalent, to service schools and communities in that area. This position should be jointly funded by the Federal Government (through sources such as *Regional Solutions*), local government and the schools. The role of the community liaison officer will be to facilitate school–community partnerships, including sourcing and accessing funding for school–community initiatives.

*Who should act? Federal government, State education departments, Catholic and other independent school bodies, local government, regional development organisations.*

### **Policy recommendation 4: Refocus VET-in-schools programs to include rural community development**

VET-in-schools programs featured as key vehicles for school contribution to rural communities in four of our five case studies. Accordingly, it is suggested that the aims, purposes and outcomes of these programs should be reviewed at a government level, and expanded from the current focus on skills and competences. In particular, it is recommended that:

- Annual evaluations of VET-in-schools programs should use a variety of measures to assess the effectiveness of the program, including both qualitative and quantitative data, and consideration of the longer term outcomes.

*Who should act? Federal and State education departments, Australian National Training Authority(ANTA), ECEF.*

- The role of VET-in-schools programs in contributing to rural community development needs to be measured, documented, formally recognised, and appropriately resourced.

*Who should act? Federal and State education and regional affairs departments, ANTA, ECEF, research funding organisations.*

### **Policy recommendation 5: Review school insurance policies and help meet the costs of public liability insurance**

More specifically, with the rapid growth of VET-in-schools, evidence suggests that policy in terms of insurance issues is lagging behind practice, at least in some States. It is therefore recommended that:

- State Departments of Education should review school insurance policies to ensure students are adequately covered while engaged in VET-in-schools activities on and off school premises.

*Who should act? State education departments, ACSSO, APC.*

Additionally, it would seem that the high cost of public liability insurance for employers can impact negatively on VET-in-schools programs, effectively preventing small, family-owned businesses from taking students on work placement. This issue is particularly critical in smaller communities, where the number of work placements is already limited. It is recommended that:

- State Government and/or Federal Governments should contribute towards the cost of public liability insurance for small employers in rural communities who provide regular work placements for VET-in-schools students.

*Who should act? Federal and State small business and regional affairs departments, ECEF.*

**Policy recommendation 6: Ensure policy flexibility**

Overall, the findings suggest that those schools and communities which have developed effective and sustainable linkages have needed some measure of flexibility in the implementation of policy, for example, in relation to the implementation of VET-in-schools programs. In some cases, this has necessitated schools taking a risk in planning and/or implementing an initiative which fell outside policy guidelines. It is therefore recommended that:

- Policy makers need to build flexibility into policies, to take into account the particular problems faced by rural schools and communities, and to allow rural schools and communities to maximise on their strengths and available resources.

*Who should act? Federal and State education and regional affairs departments and other bodies developing policy opportunities for rural schools.*

**Policy recommendation 7: Ensure appropriate support is provided for all rural schools to establish and maintain community linkages**

The findings from the study suggest that both government and independent schools are well placed in terms of their facilities, expertise, and willingness to work closely with their communities, to make significant contributions to those communities. Accordingly, it is recommended that:

- Both government and independent schools in rural areas should be encouraged and supported to develop further linkages with each other, with rural and other industry, and with community groups.

*Who should act? Federal and State education and regional affairs departments, Catholic and other independent school bodies.*

**Policy recommendation 8: Facilitate transformational and distributive leadership**

The findings have demonstrated that effective leadership for building, maintaining and transforming school–community partnerships is a process involving school and community, in which a collective need is identified and strategies to meet that need are implemented. The transformational leadership practices of key players involved in facilitating the group leadership process are an important part of the process. However, central to this study is the way in which the leadership process enabled interactions between individuals and groups internal and external to the school and community, that is, the way in which the leadership process facilitated the building and use of networks. This suggests that professional development programs for school leaders and other school staff, and rural leadership programs for community members, need to focus on activities designed to facilitate interaction and networking between individuals and groups, internal and external to the school and community. It is therefore recommended that:

- Rural leadership programs should consider the value and potential contribution of rural schools. Discussion of the leadership processes of the interventions and the lessons outlined in this report should be incorporated into the programs. Programs should explore and develop personal values in order to facilitate participation in the leadership process, and should develop skills in communicating, compromising and negotiating.

*Who should act? Providers of rural leadership programs, Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC).*

- Professional development should be available for all school staff (Principals and senior staff, teachers, ancillary staff) in the special role of rural schools in their communities. Programs should include discussion of the leadership processes of the interventions and the lessons outlined in this report. They should explore and develop personal values in order to facilitate participation in the leadership process, and should develop skills in communicating, compromising and negotiating.

*Who should act? State education departments, APAPDC.*

- State parent bodies, with appropriate financial support from Federal and State Governments, should provide leadership training to support parental participation in school decision making. Training should explore and develop personal values in order to facilitate participation in the leadership process, and should develop skills in communicating, compromising and negotiating.

*Who should act? Federal and State education departments, State parent bodies, ACSSO, APC.*

## Recommendations for research

The recommendations in the following section are directed towards researchers in the area of school–community relationships.

### Research recommendation 1: The need for replication

The indicators and suggestions for developing and maintaining effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership have been derived from case studies of five very different rural schools and communities. Recognising the limitations of the small sample size in this case study approach of only highly successful examples of school–community relations, every effort has been made to ensure the veracity of the research procedures, in terms of transferability, dependability, confirmability, trustworthiness and credibility (discussed in detail in Chapter 3: Methodology). However, the researchers are aware that the results of this study are not necessarily generalisable to other rural schools and communities. It is recommended that:

- Further research should be undertaken to test the indicators and suggestions for developing effective school–community partnerships and effective leadership across a range of other rural schools and communities.
- By way of comparison, similar research should be undertaken in large country towns and regional centres, as well as in metropolitan schools.

### Research recommendation 2: The need for models of successful ‘whole-of-government’ approaches

The findings from the study suggest that there is much scope for increased integration of health and education services in rural communities. Three of the study sites, Margaret River, Cowell and Cooktown, had their own community health facilities, including hospitals. Linkages between the health and education sectors in the first two sites were facilitated by the fact that the Directors of Nursing from both hospitals were also members of the School Council. In Cooktown, the linkages were limited to traditional health screening practices for school students. In each site, sharing of resources between health and education sectors was limited. In Walla Walla, there is no first response medical facility available, a matter of concern for both St Paul’s College and the local community. This has prompted the school to take an active role in securing funding to establish a first response medical facility, which will benefit both school and community.

Because health and education represent two of the key Government services and sources of funding in rural communities, it is recommended that:

- Further research is needed into models that facilitate the integration of existing education and health, and other services, in rural communities.
- In small rural communities where there are no first response health services, further research is needed into the way in which schools in those communities might facilitate the provision of such services.

### ***Research recommendation 3: Further research into VET-in-schools programs focusing on their contribution to community social capital***

Finally, further research is needed into the community-wide outcomes of VET-in-schools programs, which were key vehicles for school–community partnerships in four of the five study sites. In particular, it is recommended that:

- A framework should be developed to measure the extent to which VET-in-schools and other community-based learning programs contribute to the community’s stores of social capital.

## **Conclusions**

The core function of schools is to provide education for youth. The learning opportunities for the next generation of pupils will be determined by the extent to which their schools are themselves able to learn and grow. Successful schools are those providing the conditions for their pupils to learn more successfully, and our explorations have led us to conclude that vital clues lie in the school’s capacity, as well as its ability to assist in the development of a similar capacity in its community. The last decade has seen a number of innovative ways in which schools have developed educational opportunities for youth using a whole-of-community approach. As well as giving rise to positive outcomes for youth, school–community partnerships also have the potential to make significant contributions to the economic and social well-being of communities, by building capacity in terms of human and, in particular, social capital. Given that we are facing major changes in trust relations in modern communities, both rural and urban, and given the public nature of schooling that places special responsibilities and obligations on its shoulders with respect to the development of citizens and a more participative democracy, the implications of these contributions for rural community sustainability are of particular importance.

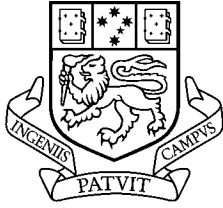
The approach to school–community relationships, however, is crucial to its long-term chances of success. A tactical approach involving a series of tactics or quick fixes, or a strategic approach focusing only on particular areas of weakness and strategies to address these areas, are not as likely to be as successful as ongoing capacity building arising from a sense of shared school–community vision for the future. At the same time, it must be recognised that building of school–community partnerships occurs over time, and leadership processes must acknowledge and build on this. This means that those schools and communities that have a balance between events-based or specific project linkages, and ongoing linkages, and in which there is a match between school and community leadership processes, would seem to be better positioned to make substantial and long-term contributions to the development of their communities. What we seek is a school and community that have a sense of agency; that is, an ability to act purposefully in pursuit of goals, to self-regulate, and to learn and change as and when they decide it is in their collective interests to do so.

# 11. Appendices

## Appendix 1: Site selection

- Proposed study information
- Nomination letter
- Media release





UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia

## **Re: Proposed study into school contribution to rural communities: Leadership issues**

### *Background to the project*

Researchers from the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia are conducting a study into the extent and nature of the contribution of schools to their rural/regional communities. The study will also investigate how the type of leadership within the school and community influences the extent and nature of this contribution.

Many small rural/regional communities are in crisis as they attempt to cope with the rapid pace of change brought about by globalisation of the economy, technological advancements, and the decline of traditional industries. Unemployment, declining population and geographical isolation are common problems. Schools are one of, if not the only, major service present in many small rural/regional areas. In addition to providing education, they provide significant opportunities for interaction within the community.

### *How can you help?*

We propose to conduct our study in communities located within five States/Territories, and we are seeking your suggestions for suitable study sites. The sites must be small rural/regional communities in which the local school(s) play an active role. To be eligible for consideration, any communities that you suggest will need to meet the following criteria:

### *Criteria for selection of community for study*

1. Community must have a population of less than 10,000 people.
2. The local school(s) must play an active and ongoing role in improving social and economic outcomes for the community. There needs to be demonstrated evidence of a close partnership between the school and one or more of the following local organisations: industry; large and small business; government, and community groups. These partnerships are many and varied, but might include:
  - the school as an integral partner with local government and community organisations in developing and maintaining an ongoing community arts or other program which fosters cohesion and a sense of shared community;

- the establishment of a VET (Vocational Education and Training) in Schools program that is responsive to the needs of local industry and small business as well as providing youth with the incentive to remain in and contribute actively to their community;
  - the school working with local community organisations and businesses to celebrate diversity by developing initiatives to mainstream those with disabilities, or those with ethnic or indigenous backgrounds.
3. The school(s) needs to be physically located within the community (for the purposes of this study, School of the Air and other forms of correspondence education or home schooling are excluded).
  4. The length of time that the school-community partnership has been operating successfully is not relevant. We are interested in studying communities at different stages of the process: from communities which are in the early stages of establishing school-community partnerships, through to communities which have been enjoying successful school-community partnerships for a number of years.
  5. We would welcome suggestions of indigenous communities in which the school(s) play an active role.

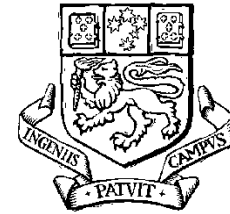
This study is important and timely because it will document the contributions of schools to rural/regional community development. It will also identify how the success of school-community partnerships is influenced by community leadership. The outcomes of this study will be recommendations to assist policy makers when making decisions about the provision of education in rural/regional communities, and about the implementation of rural and community development programs. Policy recommendations will also feed into educational leadership courses on strategies and modes of leadership which enhance school-community partnerships for the benefit of rural/regional communities.

Please feel free to suggest one or more communities for possible inclusion in the study, by completing the attached form. Suggestions need to be received at the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia by Monday 15 November 1999.

Yours sincerely

Susan Johns for  
Dr Sue Kilpatrick  
Associate Director

**Attention: Susan Johns, Centre for Research & Learning in Regional Australia**



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

**SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES**

**Suggested Community for Study**

**Your details:**

Name:.....

Address:.....

Phone:..... Email.....

Organisation that you are representing (if applicable):.....

**Community Details:**

Name and location (State) of community:.....

Local school(s) active in the community:

	<i>Name of School</i>	<i>Name of Principal</i>	<i>School contact details (address/phone)</i>
<b>School 1</b>			
<b>School 2</b> <i>(if applicable)</i>			
<b>School 3</b> <i>(if applicable)</i>			
<b>School 4</b> <i>(if applicable)</i>			

*\*Note: If you wish to nominate more than one community, please photocopy this sheet.*

When you have completed this form, please return by **Monday 15 November**.

*Fax to:* (03) 63243040    *Email to:* Susan.Johns@utas.edu.au

*Mail to:* Susan Johns, CRLRA, University of Tasmania, PO Box 1214, Launceston TAS 7250

# MEDIA RELEASE

23 September, 1999

**ATTENTION: RURAL EDITORS/WRITERS**

## **EDUCATION RESEARCHERS NEED YOUR HELP**

New research by a team from the University of Tasmania will investigate the contribution made by schools to their rural or regional communities.

The project, which will be centred on communities of less than 10,000 people throughout Australia, will be conducted by researchers from the University's Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) and Leadership for Learning Research Group (LLRG).

Specifically, the research will look at the extent and nature of the contribution of schools to their communities. The study will also investigate how the type of leadership within the school and community influences the extent and nature of this contribution.

Researchers are seeking suggestions as to possible study sites. Project leader and Associate Director of the CRLRA, Dr Sue Kilpatrick, said that the sites must be small rural/regional communities in which the local school or schools play an active role.

She said that to be eligible for consideration as a possible study site, the following criteria should be met:

- Population of less than 10,000 people;
- Demonstrated evidence of a close partnership between the school and the community, including one or more of the following local organisations: local business, industry, government or community groups; and
- At least one school must be physically located within the community.

Dr Kilpatrick said that the length of time that the school-community partnership had been operating was not relevant.

"We are interested in studying communities at different stages of the process, from communities which are in the early stages of establishing school-community partnerships, through to communities which have been enjoying successful school-community partnerships for a number of years".

"We would also welcome suggestions of indigenous communities in which the schools play an active role," she said.

Dr Kilpatrick said that the vital role that schools can and do play in community development was often overlooked.

"This study is important and timely because it will document the contributions of schools to rural/regional community development. It will also identify how the success of school-community partnerships is influenced by community leadership". Dr Kilpatrick said that results of the study will be used as recommendations to assist policy makers when making decisions about the provision of education in rural/regional communities, and about the implementation of rural and community development programs.

“Many small rural/regional communities are in crisis as they attempt to cope with the rapid pace of change brought about by globalisation of the economy, technological advancements and the decline of traditional industries. Unemployment, declining population and geographical isolation are common problems”.

“Schools are one of, if not the only, major service present in many small rural/regional areas. In addition to providing education, they provide significant opportunities for interaction within the community,” Dr Kilpatrick said.

**• If your community would like to be considered as a possible research site, or if you would like further information on the project, you should contact Mrs Susan Johns at the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia at the University of Tasmania in Launceston, phone (03) 6324 3524, fax (03) 6324 3040 or email [Susan.Johns@utas.edu.au](mailto:Susan.Johns@utas.edu.au)**

**Information released by: Media Liaison Office at Launceston. Tel: (03) 6324 3273.**

## Appendix 2: Interview schedules

### SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 1: SCHOOL STAFF

1. **How would you describe your local community?**
  - What sort of changes have been happening in the community in the last five years? How have these changes affected the community?
  - When people want to get things done (e.g. build a skateboard facility for youth, establish a community on-line access centre), how do they go about it?
2. **Briefly describe the main characteristics of your school.**
  - How does this school compare with others you have worked in?
3. **How have things changed in your school in the past couple of years?**
  - Why did the school make this change?
  - How did this change come about?
4. **What are the main ways that your school interacts with the community?**
  - How are these links established and maintained?
  - What have been the outcomes of these links? Are these links likely to continue?
  - Have there been any unexpected spinoffs from these partnerships with the community?
  - Has the school been involved in any health education programs?
  - To what extent do the school and community share physical resources and expertise?
5. **In what ways are parents and community members involved in the school?**
  - Has the role of parents in the school changed over the past few years?
  - To what extent does parental involvement make a difference in your school?
  - Does parental involvement in schools have wider community implications?
6. ***Are there any other things that the school is involved in that have been initiated from outside the school?***
  - *To what extent do factors external to the school influence your school's relationship with the community?*
7. **How involved are you in the local community?**
  - How do you think your community involvement has influenced you personally? How do you think it has influenced you in your role within the school? In what way do you think you have made a difference in the local community because of your involvement in these activities?

**SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2: YOUTH**

**1. How would you describe your local community?**

- What is it like to be a young person living in this community?
- How involved do you think young people are in making things happen in the community?
- Do you think your community has changed much over the past few years? If yes, how are things different in the community now? How have these changes in the community affected young people? You in particular?
- Do you think you will stay in this community?

**2. Tell me a bit about your school/the school you attended.**

- (If applicable) How does this school compare with others you have been to?
- How have things changed in your school over the past couple of years?
- How involved were students in helping to make these changes happen?
- What do you think about students being involved in decision making in the school?

**3. (For school leavers) What have you been doing since leaving school?**

- What were the main things that influenced you in making this decision?
- Do you think you will stay in this community?

**4. What are the main ways that your school interacts with the community?**

- What sort of activity/ies do you participate in/have you participated in at school that involve other people/groups in the community?
- What have been the outcomes of these links with the community?
- Do you think these links are likely to continue?
- Can you think of any unexpected benefits/spinoffs of these links between the school and community?
- How much of your study at school is/was related to what's happening in your community?
- Have there been any unexpected spinoffs from these projects?

**5. What extra activities are/were you involved in at school? In the community?**

- Why did you choose to become involve in these activities?
- In what ways have you gained from being involved in these activities?
- In what ways do you think you have made a difference to the school/community through your involvement in these activities?

**SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 3: PARENT/COMMUNITY MEMBER**

**1. How would you describe your local community?**

- What sort of changes have been happening in the community in the last five years? How have these changes affected the community? How have they affected you/your family?
- When people want to get things done (e.g. get a new swimming pool, build a skateboard facility for youth), how do they go about it?

**2. Briefly describe the main characteristics of your school.**

- How does this school compare with others you have been involved with?

**3. How have things changed in your school in the past couple of years?**

- How and why did this change come about?
- In what ways are parents and other community members involved in the school?
- To what extent does parental/community involvement make a difference in your school?
- Do you think this type/level of parental/community involvement is likely to continue?
- Does parental/community involvement in the school have wider community implications?

*Specific questions about **your** school involvement*

- In what way(s) are **you** involved with the school?
- Why did you choose to become involved in this way? Are you likely to continue your involvement?
- What have been the outcomes of your involvement with the school?
- Have there been any unexpected spinoffs/benefits from your involvement in the school?
- How involved are **you** in other community activities?
- Has your involvement in the school influenced you in your role in community activities?
- Has your involvement in community activities influenced you in your role in the school?

**4. In what other ways does the school interact with the community?**

- How are these links established and maintained?
- What have been the outcomes of these links? Have there been any unexpected spinoffs from these links between school and community?
- Are these links likely to continue?



**SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 4: ORGANISATION REPRESENTATIVE**

**1. How would you describe your local community?**

- What sort of changes have been happening in the community in the last five years? How have these changes affected the community? Your organisation/group/business?
- When people want to get things done (e.g. build a skateboard facility for youth, establish a community on-line access centre), how do they go about it?

**2. In general, what sort of relationship does/do the local school(s) have with the community?**

- Has the relationship between school and community always been this way? If no, when did things start to change and why?
- How have the changes that have been happening in the community over the past few years affected the school(s)? (e.g. change in enrolment numbers, curriculum changes)  
How has/have the school(s) responded to these changes?

**3. Briefly describe your organisation/group/business/role in the community.**

**4. Tell me about the links between your organisation/group/business and the local school.**

- How are these links established and maintained?
- What have been the outcomes of these links?
- Are these links likely to continue?
- Have there been any unexpected spinoffs from these partnerships with the community?
- *To what extent does your organisation/group/business and the school share physical resources and expertise?*
- *What about sharing of resources between the school and other organisations/groups/businesses in the community?*

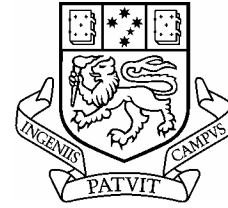
**5. Does your organisation/group/business have links with other schools in the region?**

**6. Apart from your involvement with the school(s), how involved are you personally in the local community?**

- How do you think your community involvement has influenced you personally?
- How has it influenced you in your role within your organisation/group/business?
- What about in your relationship with the local school(s)?
- How do you think you have made a difference in this community?

## **Appendix 3: Participant information**

- Information sheet
- Informed consent (Principals)
- Informed consent (others)
- Parental consent
- Further consent



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

## ***INFORMATION SHEET***

### **SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES**

Chief investigator: Dr Sue Kilpatrick, Associate Director,  
Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia,  
University of Tasmania

Researchers from the University of Tasmania are conducting a nationwide study into the nature and extent of the contribution of schools to their rural communities. The study will also investigate how the type of leadership within the school and community influences the school-community partnership. Funding for the project has been provided by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

Five communities have been selected to participate in the study: Cooktown (Qld), Cowell (SA), Margaret River (WA), Meander (Tas) and Walla Walla (NSW). These communities have been selected from over 100 nominations from around Australia. They were selected to represent diversity in respect of population size and background, degree of isolation, school configuration, type of rural and other industry, and nature and stage of development of the school-community partnership.

Schools are often the major service present in many rural areas. In addition to providing education, schools provide significant opportunities for interaction within the community. However, the vital role that schools can and do play in community development is often overlooked. This study is important because it will investigate and document the contributions of rural schools to their community's development. It will also investigate how various factors, including school-community leadership, influence the effectiveness of the school-community partnership. The study will build on findings from a pilot study into the contribution of schools to their rural communities, which was conducted recently by this research team.

It is proposed to collect information from three main sources: (1) interviews with school staff, students, parents and wider community members; (2) observation, and (3) school and community documents. Both individual and group interview sessions will be conducted. All interviews will be face-to-face, and will be audio recorded with your permission, to be transcribed later. It is expected that individual interviews will take about 45 minutes, and group interviews about one hour.

Data will be analysed in conjunction with existing literature on school-community interaction. NUD\*IST qualitative data analysis software will provide computer-aided data analysis.

Recommendations from the study will include strategies for developing and maintaining effective school-community partnerships. These recommendations will assist policy makers when making decisions about the provision of education in rural communities, and about the implementation of

community development programs. Policy recommendations will also feed into educational leadership and rural leadership courses.

*Results of investigation*

The initial findings from this study will be presented to each community via a community workshop. At these workshops, feedback on the findings will be sought from community members. This feedback will inform the final report.

*Confidentiality*

Every effort will be made to maintain confidentiality of research data. Data obtained in interviews will be stored separately from details of the information sources.

*Anonymity*

Any identifying information will be removed from the data before presentation. Names of participants will not be used or linked with their respective contributions. The data will be used for research purposes only.

*Freedom to refuse or withdraw*

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Participants may terminate their involvement at any time without prejudice.

*Contact person*

If you have any queries about this study please contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Sue Kilpatrick, at the University of Tasmania:  
phone (03) 6324 3018, fax (03) 6324 3040, or email Sue.Kilpatrick@utas.edu.au

*Concerns or complaints*

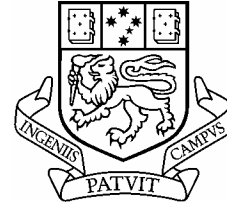
If you have any concerns of an ethical nature or complaints about the manner in which the project is conducted, you may contact the Chair or Executive Officer of the University Ethics Committee (Human Experimentation):

Chair: Dr Margaret Otlowski phone (03) 6226 7569

Executive Officer: Ms Chris Hooper phone (03) 6226 2763

This project has received ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (Human Experimentation), as well as from the appropriate State Government Departments of Education, and the appropriate State Catholic and other independent school education governing bodies.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep.



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

**Statement of informed consent for Principals**

**SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES**

This study will enquire about the nature and importance of school contribution to the community, and how this contribution may be influenced by modes of school-community leadership.

I agree to participate in this research project and understand that:

1. The nature of my participation includes answering questions verbally that will be audio-recorded.
2. Other willing staff members and students from the school will also be interviewed either individually or in groups.
3. Students will not be interviewed unless a signed parental consent form for each participating student has been obtained.
4. The time required for each individual interview is about 45 minutes, and for focus groups one hour.
5. There is a possibility that this study could reveal differences amongst or between principal, teachers and students. If any discomfort should arise during the interview, participants will be invited to cease the activity.
6. My participation and the participation of my staff and students is entirely voluntary. I/they may terminate my/their involvement at any time without prejudice.
7. All data are confidential.
8. All data are for research purposes only.
9. If I have questions about the research or need to talk to the Chief Investigator during or after participation in the study I can contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Sue Kilpatrick, Associate Director, Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania on (03) 63243018.
10. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
11. The nature and possible effects of this study have been answered to my satisfaction.
12. I agree that research data gathered may be published provided I/my staff cannot be identified as a subject.

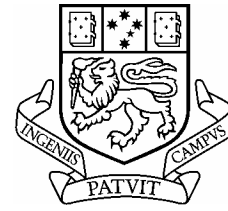
Name of participant:.....

Participant's signature:.....Date:.....

I have explained this project and the implications in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of interviewer:.....

Interviewer's signature:.....Date:.....



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

**Statement of informed consent for school staff, students and community members**

**SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES**

This study will enquire about the nature and importance of school contribution to the community, and how this contribution may be influenced by modes of school-community leadership.

I agree to participate in this research project and understand that:

1. The time required for the interview is about 45 minutes (individual interview) or one hour (group interview).
2. I will be required to answer questions verbally that will be audio-recorded. There is a possibility that this study could reveal differences amongst or between principal/other staff/students/community members. If any discomfort should arise during the interview, I will be invited to cease the activity.
3. My participation is entirely voluntary. I may terminate my involvement at any time without prejudice.
4. All my data are for research purposes only.
5. If I have questions about the research or need to talk to the Chief Investigator during or after my participation in the study I can contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Sue Kilpatrick, Associate Director, Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania on (03) 63243018.
6. I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study.
7. The nature and possible effects of this study have been answered to my satisfaction.
8. I agree that research data gathered may be published provided I cannot be identified as a subject.

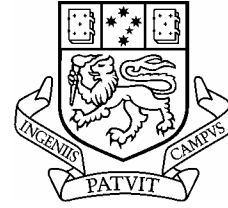
Name of participant:.....

Participant's signature:.....Date:.....

I have explained this project and the implications in it to this volunteer and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of interviewer:.....

Interviewer's signature:.....Date:.....



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

**REQUEST FOR PARENTAL APPROVAL TO INTERVIEW A STUDENT  
SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES**

Attached in an information sheet about a study that researchers from the University of Tasmania are undertaking. This study will enquire about the nature and importance of your school’s contribution to the community, and how this contribution may be influenced by modes of school-community leadership.

We plan to interview the Principal, some staff members, some parents and some students from your child’s school. Your child has been selected by the Principal to participate in an interview with a small group of other students. Details are as follows:

1. The time required for the group interview will be about one hour.
2. Your child will be required to answer questions verbally that will be audio-recorded. There is a slight risk that this study could cause embarrassment amongst your child and other children. Every effort will be made to minimise this risk. If any discomfort should arise during the interview, your child will be invited to cease the activity.
3. Your child’s participation is entirely voluntary. He/she may terminate his/her involvement at any time without prejudice.
4. All data collected are for research purposes only.

Before we can undertake this interview, we need to obtain your written approval for your child to participate. If you are prepared for your child to take part, would you please complete and sign the section below, and return it to school with your child as soon as possible. Please note that this project has received ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (Human Experimentation), and from the appropriate Government and Non-Government educational governing body in each State.

.....

**Parental approval for child’s participation in the University of Tasmania study: “School contribution to rural communities: Leadership issues”**

I ..... (parent’s full name) consent to my child ..... (child’s full name) participating in the University of Tasmania study into ‘School contribution to rural communities: Leadership issues’.

I have read and understood the Information Sheet for this study. I understand that if I have questions about the research or need to talk to the Chief Investigator at any time before, during or after my child’s participation in the study, I can contact the Chief Investigator, Dr Sue Kilpatrick, Associate Director, Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania on (03) 6324 3018. I agree that research data gathered may be published provided my child cannot be identified as a subject.

Signature of parent:.....Date:.....

## School contribution to rural communities

### Further contact form

Preliminary findings from this study will be presented at a community meeting during June or July 2001. The purpose of this meeting is to seek input from community members who participated in the interviews.

If you would like to receive advice regarding the date for the community meeting, please provide your expected contact details for 2001 below.

Name:.....

Address\*.....

.....

Phone: ..... Fax: .....

Email:.....

*\*School students and staff please provide details of your expected school address for 2001.*



## Appendix 4: Data analysis framework

Q.S.R. NUD.IST Power version, revision 4.0.  
Licensee: Faculty of Education.

PROJECT: School contribution project, User Susan Johns, 8:32 am, Sept 18, 2001.

- (1) /Community
- (1 1) /Community/Services
- (1 2) /Community/Resources
- (1 3) /Community/Issues
- (1 3 1) /Community/Issues/Environmental
- (1 3 2) /Community/Issues/Youth
- (1 3 3) /Community/Issues/Employment
- (1 4) /Community/Conflict
- (1 5) /Community/Participation in
- (1 6) /Community/Isolation
- (2) /School
- (2 1) /School/Resources
- (2 1 1) /School/Resources/Human
- (2 1 1 1) /School/Resources/Human/Staff
- (2 1 1 2) /School/Resources/Human/Parents
- (2 1 1 3) /School/Resources/Human/Students
- (2 1 2) /School/Resources/Physical
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- (2 1 2 2) /School/Resources/Physical/Equipment
- (2 1 2 3) /School/Resources/Physical/Other
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- (2 2) /School/Organisation
- (2 3) /School/Structure
- (2 4) /School/Culture
- (2 5) /School/Curriculum
- (2 6) /School/Vision
- (2 7) /School/Policy
- (2 8) /School/Attitudes towards
- (2 9) /School/Size
- (2 9 1) /School/Size/Small
- (2 9 2) /School/Size/Large
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- (3 2 1 2) /Population/Nature/Characteristics/Diverse
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- (3 2 1 4) /Population/Nature/Characteristics/Innovative
- (3 2 2) /Population/Nature/Relationships
- (3 2 3) /Population/Nature/Lifestyle
- (3 2 4) /Population/Nature/Socioeconomic
- (3 3) /Population/Continuity
- (4) /Change
- (5) /School contributions
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- (5 1 1) /School contributions/Vehicles/Curriculum based
- (5 1 1 1) /School contributions/Vehicles/Curriculum based/VET in schools
- (5 1 1 2) /School contributions/Vehicles/Curriculum based/Other programs
- (5 1 2) /School contributions/Vehicles/Resource based
- (5 1 3) /School contributions/Vehicles/Event based
- (5 1 4) /School contributions/Vehicles/Enterprise based
- (5 1 5) /School contributions/Vehicles/Other
- (6) /Relationships
- (6 1) /Relationships/School

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(6 1 4 4) /Relationships/School/Bodies/Other  
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(6 2 1 2) /Relationships/Community/Community individuals/Children  
(6 2 1 3) /Relationships/Community/Community individuals/Youth  
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(6 2 1 6) /Relationships/Community/Community individuals/Other  
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centre  
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 (12 2 3 2) /Case data/Interviewee type/Parent/Formal involvement

(12 2 3 3) /Case data/Interviewee type/Parent/Informal & formal involvement

(12 2 4) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group

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(12 2 4 4) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Government

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(12 2 4 4 2) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Government/State

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(12 2 4 6) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Church

(12 2 4 7) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Service club

(12 2 4 8) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Sport group

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(12 2 4 14) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Indigenous group

(12 2 4 15) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Other group

(12 2 4 15 1) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Other group/Internal

(12 2 4 15 2) /Case data/Interviewee type/Community group/Other group/External

(12 3) /Case data/Gender

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(12 3 2) /Case data/Gender/Male

(12 4) /Case data/Indigenous

(12 5) /Case data/Years in community

(12 5 1) /Case data/Years in community/<3 years

(12 5 2) /Case data/Years in community/3-10 years

(12 5 3) /Case data/Years in community/>10 years

(12 5 4) /Case data/Years in community/Dont live in community

(12 6) /Case data/Years at school

(12 6 1) /Case data/Years at school/<3 years

(12 6 2) /Case data/Years at school/3-10 years

(12 6 3) /Case data/Years at school/>10 years

(12 6 4) /Case data/Years at school/No school involvement

(12 7) /Case data/Other school involvement

(12 7 1) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type

(12 7 1 1) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/Rural

(12 7 1 1 1) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/Rural/Years

(12 7 1 1 1 1) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/Rural/Years/<3 years

(12 7 1 1 1 2) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/Rural/Years/3-10 years

(12 7 1 1 1 3) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/Rural/Years/>10 years

(12 7 1 1 1 4) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/Rural/Years/No school involvement

(12 7 1 2) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/Metropolitan

(12 7 1 2 1) /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/

Metropolitan/Years  
(12 7 1 2 1 /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/  
1) Metropolitan/Years/<3 years  
(12 7 1 2 1 /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/  
2) Metropolitan/Years/3-10 years  
(12 7 1 2 1 /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/  
3) Metropolitan/Years/>10 years  
(12 7 1 2 1 /Case data/Other school involvement/School type/  
4) Metropolitan/Years/No school involvement  
(12 8) /Case data/Age  
(12 8 1) /Case data/Age/under 13 years  
(12 8 2) /Case data/Age/13-20 years  
(12 8 3) /Case data/Age/21-30 years  
(12 8 4) /Case data/Age/31-40 years  
(12 8 5) /Case data/Age/41-50 years  
(12 8 6) /Case data/Age/51-60 years  
(12 8 7) /Case data/Age/over 60 years  
(12 9) /Case data/Type of community  
(12 9 1) /Case data/Type of community/Homogenous  
(12 9 2) /Case data/Type of community/Diverse  
(12 9 3) /Case data/Type of community/Declining  
(12 9 4) /Case data/Type of community/Stable  
(12 9 5) /Case data/Type of community/Growing  
(12 10) /Case data/Type of school  
(12 10 1) /Case data/Type of school/Main school  
(12 10 2) /Case data/Type of school/Other school

**Appendix 5: Preliminary findings**



**School contribution to rural communities:  
Leadership issues**

**A summary of project findings**

**June 2001**

by the

*Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia*

and

*Leadership for Learning Research Group*

University of Tasmania

Supported by the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation





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## **Project overview**

### **Aims and significance of the study**

Schools are one of, if not the only, major service present in many small rural areas. In addition to providing education, they provide significant opportunities for interaction within the community. The purpose of this study was to document the contributions of schools to rural community development and to identify those factors, including leadership, that influence the effectiveness of school-community partnerships.

Specifically, the aims of the study are:

1. To examine the extent and nature of the contribution of rural schools to their communities' development beyond traditional forms of education of young people, including: the use of the skills and knowledge of the school staff in initiating, organising and/or running wider community activities and projects; the opportunities provided for adults in the community for personal development and skill acquisition through involvement in school activities and school bodies such as school councils; and the importance of the physical school resources to small communities.
2. To investigate the ways in which the modes of leadership of the school and community leaders influence the extent and nature of the school's contribution to the community.
3. To consider the constraints to schools being put to other uses (e.g. issue of insurance cover).

It is expected that recommendations from the study will include strategies for developing and maintaining effective school-community partnerships, which will assist policy makers when making decisions about the provision of education in rural/regional communities, and about the implementation of community development programs. Policy recommendations will also feed into educational leadership and rural leadership courses.

This two-year, national study is funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. A full report containing project findings and recommendations will be submitted to the funding body in September 2001.

### **Selection of study sites**

Five communities were chosen to participate in the study. Where sites supported more than one school, a focal school was nominated for detailed study. The five sites and their focal schools are:

- Cooktown (Qld)  
(Cooktown State School and Secondary Department)
- Cowell (SA)  
(Cowell Area School)
- Margaret River (WA)  
(Margaret River Senior High School)
- Meander (Tas)  
(Meander Primary School)
- Walla Walla (NSW)  
(St Paul's College)

The five sites were selected from over 100 nominations from around Australia. Nominations were received from State/Territory Department of Education Superintendents and their counterparts in the private education sector; State/Territory and private school parent representative bodies, and professional groups and key individuals associated with rural education and rural community development. The five sites were selected in consultation with the project Reference Group, comprising experts in educational policy, educational leadership, rural education, community development, and parental participation in school governance. Each site demonstrates a close

partnership between school and community. Sites were selected to represent diversity in respect of population size and background, school configuration, type of rural and other industry, degree of remoteness, and nature and stage of the school-community partnership.

### **Sources of data**

Data from each site were collected using three techniques:

1. Semi-structured interviews with school and community representatives
2. Written documentation collected from school and community
3. Researcher observation

Interviewees were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, to represent the following target groups:

- students (both current students and school leavers where possible);
- school staff including the Principal;
- parents and other community individuals (including representation of different genders, ethnicities and socioeconomic groupings where possible);
- representatives of community organisations and groups (e.g. local government, rural and other industry, business, service clubs, environmental groups).

### **What is the nature and extent of school contributions to rural communities?**

Most of the successful school-community linkages identified in this study were focused, in the first instance, on improving and enhancing educational, training, social and leadership opportunities for rural youth, using a whole-of-community approach. Examples of this include VET-in-schools programs, the operation of school enterprises such as school farms, and a variety of other programs in which school students work directly with individuals or groups from the community, such as the disabled or elderly, local artists and musicians, environmental groups, or voluntary service groups. Other linkages were more pragmatic, such as sharing of school and community facilities and resources, activities designed to raise funds for the school, or activities aimed at improving the school and community environment.

The findings indicate that school-community linkages deliver a variety of positive outcomes for youth, and also for the community. The key outcomes, which are a synthesis of findings from each of the five study sites, are outlined below. Not all outcomes are relevant to all sites.

### **Outcomes for youth**

- *Educational* (e.g. increased youth attendance at, and retention in, secondary school).
- *Personal development* (e.g. increased self-esteem and self-confidence; increased opportunities to participate in community activities and undertake a community leadership role).
- *Social/civic* (e.g. increased chances of, and opportunities for, retention in their communities, allowing youth to continue to access social and family support systems; increased knowledge and awareness of the way in which workplaces, voluntary organisations and other community structures operate).
- *Employment/career* (increased chances of securing local employment or becoming self-employed, through participation in school-community initiatives such as VET-in-schools and enterprise education programs).

### **Outcomes for the community**

- *Personal development* (e.g. increased self-confidence and self-esteem of community members, including the elderly, whose skills and knowledge are recognised and valued by the school).

- *Social* (e.g. increased levels of intergenerational trust as youth and adults work together; retention of youth in rural communities; increased sense of community pride and self-efficacy associated with successful school-community initiatives).
- *Community learning* (e.g. fostering community cohesiveness and breaking down barriers by bringing together diverse community groups to work together on projects associated with their youth; school staff provide a skills base for community members to draw upon; school provides a leadership model and leadership expertise for the community; school provides a venue, facilities, equipment and opportunities to facilitate and support community learning opportunities; school-initiated linkages are the catalyst for other community development activities; school-community linkages bring about attitudinal change and enhance community awareness, in relation to important issues for rural communities, such as the value of training to rural and other workers, the importance of implementing occupational health and safety legislation, new practices in primary industry, the personal benefits to be derived from volunteerism, and the significance of voluntary groups in small rural communities).
- *Environmental* (e.g. the school's role in areas such as recycling, coastal regeneration, river care, weed control and land use practices, and in increasing community awareness of environmental issues).
- *Economic* (e.g. the school and its staff 'buying local'; attraction of new people to the community because of publicised success of VET-in-schools programs; provision of a well-structured skills base to support local industry; profits from school farm enterprises are reinvested in the school and community).

The above points provide evidence of the important role of rural schools in building community social capital, that is, in providing opportunities for community interaction and bringing together people and resources necessary to plan and develop projects that will benefit the whole community.

## **What facilitates school contribution to rural communities?**

### **Overview of key issues**

This section contains a summary of the key findings. The findings will then be discussed in more detail in the discussion section which follows.

#### ***Leadership issues***

- Principals and school councils (or similar bodies), with shared visions regarding the importance of school-community interaction, provide the foundation for developing and sustaining effective school-community partnerships.
- Effective and sustainable school-community linkages are built around common purpose and the shared vision of school and community. The process of developing common purpose and shared vision requires time.
- Rural schools are able to contribute to their communities more effectively when there is a match between school and community leadership structures and processes.
- As rural schools develop and extend community linkages, the way they go about this reflects the stage of development of the school-community partnership.
- School Principals and other formal school leaders play an important role in developing the leadership capacity of the community.
- Other school staff can take effective leadership roles in school-community partnerships.
- School-community linkages are facilitated by a boundary crosser or champion.
- Changes in the nature and extent of parental involvement and participation in rural schools in recent years has facilitated the development of more broad-based school-community partnerships.

#### ***Resourcing and systemic issues***

- Access to adequate financial resources facilitates the implementation of school-community linkages.

- Continuity of human and other resources is essential to the development and sustainability of effective school-community linkages.
- Effective leaders within schools and communities capitalise on opportunities provided by policy, that fit with their visions for their school and community.
- Effective policy implementation entails a bottom-up approach, which builds upon and develops existing relationships within the community.
- Systemic issues, such as legislative requirements relating to community use of school facilities, which recognise the importance of rural schools to their communities, facilitate school-community linkages.

#### ***Other issues***

- Publicity of effective school-community linkages consolidates and strengthens the school's relationship with its community.
- Rural economic conditions influence the extent to which rural schools are able to contribute to their communities.

#### ***Vehicles which enhance school contribution to rural communities***

- Schools which have a balance between events-based and ongoing linkages are well placed to contribute effectively to their communities.
- VET-in-schools programs are significant vehicles for establishing and maintaining strong links between rural schools and their communities.

### **Discussion of key issues**

#### ***Leadership issues***

- Principals and school councils (or similar bodies), with shared visions regarding the importance of school-community interaction, provide the foundation for developing and sustaining effective school-community partnerships.

Shared vision is at the core of school-community partnerships. The following extract from Margaret River, comments on the importance of shared vision of the P & C and Principal. In this site the P & C is closely aligned with the school's formal management group, in that four P & C representatives are also members of the school management group:

... the P and C is very closely aligned with the school administration, there's a lot of mutual respect, we don't always agree, we've had some very strong differences but we respect each other ... I think it comes down to a vision thing, there's no doubt that there is a sense of shared vision that the school is very important in this community and of course hence the reciprocal.

Each of the Principals from the five focal schools and, where applicable, their school councils or equivalent bodies, supported the school-community partnership at both a managerial level and an operational level. For example, in Walla Walla, the school Board of Management and the Principal shared a vision of a close relationship between school and community. The Principal explains:

The issue that we are looking at currently is that the school cannot stand alone by itself and insulated from the community. We, I have a very strong philosophical position that says that even though we are a private school we should be perceived and viewed as a community resource, and so looking at where we are heading philosophically and strategically for the school is that the agricultural, or the rural studies component, the VET component is very, very strong here and we've been pushing that.

This vision was clearly articulated within the school, and was supported by appropriate resourcing. For example, despite financial cutbacks at the school, there was an increase in resourcing for the school's equine centre. The centre forms an integral part of the school's rural VET program and is one of the key school-community linkages. Increased resources for the Centre is tangible evidence of the support of school leadership for the program.

- Effective and sustainable school-community linkages are built around common purpose and the shared vision of school and community. The process of developing common purpose and shared vision requires time to develop.

There was ample evidence within the study sites to indicate that it takes time for schools and communities to build a sense of common purpose and develop a shared vision for the future. There was also evidence to indicate that the time taken to develop common purpose was time well spent, in that partnerships built around a sense of common purpose were more likely to be sustainable in the long term. For example, in Cooktown the school and community took over twelve months of discussion, negotiation and planning to develop the *Step Ahead* VET program, before the first intake of students. This was reported by all concerned to be time well spent. One of the reasons for the effectiveness of the program is the continuing high level of commitment of school and community to the program. Speaking of the employers who provide work placements for *Step Ahead* students, the following respondent noted:

I'm happy to say that the commitment is still there with the same people that we started with four years ago.

In Cowell as well, it was recognised that time spent developing a shared school-community vision for its Certificate in Aquaculture VET program was vital to ensure that the interests of all stakeholders were met. As one respondent noted:

... everyone had a different idea and that's when you had a storming session that went on for a few years.

Developing a shared vision requires that all stakeholders are involved in negotiations from the beginning. This will help to ensure that school-community initiatives do not become the property of selected individuals or groups, rather than the whole community. When it is perceived that certain individuals or groups have been excluded (intentionally or otherwise) from the process, this is likely to give rise to feelings of resentment. For example, in Cooktown, a small number of teaching staff who were not directly involved in developing the *Step Ahead* program, described feelings of resentment at the amount of publicity and resources being received by staff who were involved.

- Rural schools are able to contribute to their communities more effectively when there is a match between school and community leadership structures and processes.

Each of the communities in our study had different, but very clear and well understood leadership processes, and clear expectations about how to go about achieving things. In Meander, leadership tends to be a relatively informal process. Rather than clearly defined, or hierarchical leadership structures, different informal groups of community members come together at different times, as the situation dictates, to address community issues or plan community events. Similarly, the school reflects relatively informal and egalitarian group decisionmaking processes, where community members are offered a variety of informal and some more formal opportunities to have input into school governance:

The thing about this school compared to others is there is less bureaucracy, it's less conservative ... relationships are important and not so much the formal structures.

These processes are facilitated by the accessibility of the school Principal to community members both within and outside school hours, the open door policy of the school which encourages and welcomes community members, and the way in which the school has demonstrated its willingness to accept and implement new ideas. This acceptance is demonstrated when the school changes or modifies existing practices, such as curriculum offerings, to reflect the needs and interests of the community.

In Margaret River and Cowell, where the community has more clearly defined structures and processes for community decisionmaking, revolving around the committee process, the schools

reflect and model this structure and process. Findings from this study also suggest that schools have been responsible, to some extent, for shaping leadership structures and processes within their communities, by not only modelling, but also by facilitating collaborative leadership processes and shared leadership. For example, in Cowell, the school has actively fostered the development of a new community committee responsible for operating the school's boarding hostel. School leaders are guiding and developing the skills of committee members as they learn to function effectively as a group. As the committee gradually gains maturity in terms of its group processes, the role of the school will decline.

- As rural schools develop and extend community linkages, the way they go about this reflects the stage of development of the school-community partnership.

In communities with early or developing school-community partnerships, such as Walla Walla, the leadership process is likely to be more centralised and directive, with a greater focus on the role of the Principal and other formal school leaders and leadership structures. These formal leaders develop a vision and strategy for the school, in relation to its interaction with its community, which is then communicated within the school, and gradually through the community. This does not mean that others within the school and community cannot take on leadership roles, but their involvement in school leadership will depend on the extent to which their goals (and proposed initiatives) match the vision and strategy devised by formal school leaders. For example, at Walla Walla there was ample evidence of students undertaking leadership roles in relation to the organisation of sporting and social activities, and school staff taking on leadership roles in relation to the development the school's extensive agriculture program. All of these activities supported the formal vision of the school working closely with its community. In sites such as Walla Walla, with early or developing school-community partnerships, the school, rather than the community, is more likely to be the initiator of ideas for school-community linkages. The school then works through a process of involving the wider community, to build support for and develop the initiative to reflect the shared interests of both school and community.

In Cooktown, a site with a developing school-community partnership, the timing of the introduction of the *Step Ahead* VET-in-schools program was important, because it provided a significant opportunity for the community to begin to work together to determine its own future. Cooktown was emerging from a period of local government under administration from outside the community, and was coming to realise some measures of success in controlling its own destiny. The timing of the *Step Ahead* program, with its emphasis on community self-sufficiency and community ownership, and the formation of a community management committee which brought together diverse sectors of the community with a common purpose, could not have been better.

In communities with a more developed school-community partnership, such as Margaret River, leadership in relation to school-community initiatives is more likely to be diffused amongst the community. Initiatives are more likely to come from the community, or to arise as joint school-community initiatives in response to shared concerns or issues. For example, the structured workplace learning (SWL) program at Margaret River Senior High School came about as the result of shared school and business community concerns about youth education, training and social issues. It was developed by school and business representatives, and leadership was provided by a committee comprised of school and community representatives. This diffused leadership is illustrated in the following extract, describing the role of the SWL management committee:

I think that is one of the strengths of the program that [an employer having problems with a structured work-based learning student] rang me and not the school, yeah, I think that just shows how strong the committee was ... and people recognised that the committee were very much part of running the show, that they could talk to us and that was as good as talking to the school.

The vision for the project was shared by school and community from the beginning, with the management committee playing a key role in building support for the program. The management committee have been so effective in this role that they have now gone into recess, and the program is essentially self-managing, with individual employers initiating contact with the school as appropriate.

- School Principals and other formal school leaders play an important role in developing the leadership capacity of the community.

Within each site there was evidence that formal school leaders (not only Principals, but also staff with various responsibilities) played an important role in developing the leadership capacity within communities. They achieved this by focusing on the development of relationships between school and community based on trust and mutual respect, by bringing together diverse community groups and building networks of association within and outside the community, and by actively modelling distributive leadership practices within their schools. These leaders demonstrated extensive linkages and high visibility within their communities, sometimes through formal associations with community groups such as service clubs and church groups, and sometimes through extensive informal and social networks.

At the heart of all these practices was a school culture of inclusivity, fostered by Principals and other formal school leaders, at both a managerial and operational level. The following extract, in relation to the school management group at Margaret River Senior High School, describes how inclusivity, based on mutual respect between individuals, is at the heart of formal leadership processes in most of our study sites. Inclusivity is the first stage in empowering or enabling others to participate in the leadership process:

There doesn't seem to be in the school a real idea of hanging onto the institution ... if someone could put up a case for changing things or for a new idea then it's discussed and weighed up on its merit ... I see it as being a very democratic group in that whether the idea's put forward by the Principal or by a cleaner, it still gets the same amount of air time ...

In another example, the Principal from Walla Walla set out to create a climate that encouraged and supported staff, students and the pastor in initiatives that matched his own and the board of management's philosophy and visions. He acknowledged the success that followed from giving leaders plenty of freedom and scope to pursue their initiatives.

- Other school staff can take effective leadership roles in school-community partnerships.

There are many examples from our study sites of enthusiastic and motivated school staff taking responsibility for the development of school-community initiatives. For example, the farm manager from Walla Walla, featured in the following extract, was empowered and supported by the Principal and formal school leaders as he strengthened important linkages between the school and the rural community:

... we should be perceived and viewed as a community resource, and so looking at where we are heading philosophically and strategically ... the rural studies component, is very, very strong here and we've been pushing that ... it's ... down to [the farm manager] the main inspiration behind it you know, just likes to take the ball and run with it, so it means it's good to be given a really good run.

- School-community linkages are facilitated by a boundary crosser or champion

Within all sites, there is evidence of the presence of boundary crossers or champions of school-community linkages. Boundary crossers are defined as well respected and well known community members, who may be, but are not necessarily, also school staff members. They use their extensive networks both within and often outside the community, to facilitate interaction and



build trust between school and community. The role of the boundary crosser is illustrated in the following extract:

[The school VET coordinator] is the type of person who has a lot of energy, she's very community minded and can see out to the peripherals, to see how if we do this then that will affect that and may acquire an advantage to the town in a number of other different ways. She's definitely a person who knows how to work through the bureaucracy of government and government departments ... she has a very broad network ... she's the type of person that really helps initiate and get things going.

For example, the coordinator of the community online access centre in Meander is a boundary crosser, who has helped to foster dialogue and interaction between different community groups, because of his multiple community roles, as a part-time teacher in the school, parent, member of the school council, and hobby farmer.

In some sites, schools have recognised the importance of boundary crossers in helping them to work more effectively with their community, and have employed them within the school. For example, the VET coordinator in Cooktown was formerly a local business operator and member of local government, and the Aquaculture Liaison Officer in Cowell is also a local business person.

In other sites, boundary crossers are not employed by the school, but have strong relationships with school staff based on shared values, and work closely with the school to promote these. A good example comes from Margaret River, where one boundary crosser who runs his own professional practice, is a parent, President of the Parents & Friends (P & F)<sup>5</sup> and a member of the school management group. Another key boundary crosser in this site is a representative of small business groups within the region, whose networks within and external to the community have contributed to the strong relationship between the school and the business community.

- Changes in the nature and extent of parental involvement and participation in rural schools in recent years has facilitated the development of more broad-based school-community partnerships.

Evidence from our case study sites shows that more males, and more people from business and professional backgrounds, are becoming involved in school leadership, particularly through school councils (or equivalent bodies) and, to a lesser extent, P & F groups. This has come about for a variety of reasons, including the mandating of school councils in most States, and changing social conditions which have seen more men involved with their children's education. Changing social conditions have also led to more women becoming involved in leadership roles in terms of school governance.

Evidence from our study sites indicates the benefit of more broad-based parental involvement in school governance is the formation of increased linkages between school and community groups, including business and industry sectors, and the attendant spin offs in terms of increased sources of support for school-community linkages. For some P & F groups in the study (for example, in Margaret River), this has brought about a change in focus: more labour intensive, hands-on fund raising activities have been replaced by a coordination role of the P & F's fundraising enterprises such as the school canteen and the school uniform shop. For other P & F groups, hands-on fundraising remains a priority, but sometimes activities are focused on the wider community and are on a larger scale. An example of this is the catering activities of the P & F group in Cowell, which provide an important service to the community.

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<sup>5</sup> For consistency in this paper, all parent representative groups will be referred to as P & F. It is acknowledged that in some States these groups have different titles, such as Parents & Citizens (P & C).

In some sites, such as Margaret River, it was evident that the strength of these more broad-based school-community links, through bodies such as P & F and school management group, was the catalyst for all other school-community links. For example, community members of the school management group, who are themselves respected community leaders, used their networks to build support for, and encourage participation in, a number of school-community initiatives, including the school's structured workplace learning program.

However, the change in the nature and extent of parental involvement in schools was not always seen as positive. For example, in Meander several parents, who were members of the P & F, felt they had been disenfranchised within the school community, because of the advent of the School council, which had attracted a number of parents interested in having input into school decisionmaking issues:

They've [P & F members] been sort of pushed into a sort of a, you know, like almost like a second rate group of people, you know, there's the ones who are just on the edges, helping to feed the chooks so to speak ...

This extract illustrates a perception that their fundraising work was undervalued and looked down upon by those involved in the real business of running the school. They also pointed out that not everybody had the skills or desire to participate at the school council level.

A potentially negative outcome of more broad-based parental involvement in school governance, could be that in some cases, those parents involved in school governance tend to represent white, professional, middle class people with well developed skills in lobbying and meeting procedure. These people are clearly an asset to the school, and well placed to facilitate school-community linkages. However, care must be taken to ensure that the concerns and interests of all community sectors are represented in school governance, so as not to disenfranchise the many other community groups that make up the school community. This is illustrated in the following extract from Cowell:

I actually think the power has shifted quite a bit, from when I first came here ... back in those days I believe it was a very powerful group, and you tended to have the same people year after year involved in School Council. It tended to be mainly parents of the farming community. I think Council in the last two or three years has changed dramatically, we would have farming families represented ... mining families ... fishermen ... the aquaculture industry, we have people who are shop owners, or work in the business now ... we have a lot of single parents in our school, unemployed people as well ... and if people have got an issue with School Council ... I've worked very hard to get them onto School Council ... School Council to me is about getting a wide view of perspective.

### ***Resourcing and systemic issues***

- Access to adequate financial resources facilitates the implementation of school-community linkages.

Most schools reported that financial resources were critical to the implementation of school-community linkages, particularly formal linkages such as VET-in-schools programs. In order to access resources, the timing of the implementation of VET-in-schools programs was important. The schools in our study sites reflected, and were able to capitalise on, national interest in the potential of vocational education and training for school students, and were able to access resources accordingly.

For other school-community initiatives, some concerns were expressed regarding the availability of resources and the congruence of their guidelines with school operating constraints. The following extract relating to a collaborative project between school, service club, local council and environmental group, illustrates these concerns:

The risk is... [with the teacher] now jumping in and getting the display stuff done, which is good, but if the school is kept waiting for the [service club] and the Council to be ready, then the academic year is finished and they are ready to[start] ... build but the school is not ready.

Other funding concerns expressed included lack of knowledge as to how to access the different sources of funding available, and inexperience of school and community members in appropriate levels of financial management practices needed to acquit grants from external funding bodies.

- Continuity of human and other resources is essential to the development and sustainability of effective school-community linkages.

In Walla Walla, as the school was attempting to rebuild community relationships following a period of declining school-community relations, two of the key players were the equine studies teacher and school farm manager. Both had worked at the school for a number of years. Even during the school's downturn these staff members represented the two key areas in which there was considerable community interaction. It is significant that the equine centre and school farm, and the staff members responsible for them, are also at the centre of the new period of school-community interaction.

By contrast, in Cowell it was felt that lack of continuity of staffing had hindered the early development of the school's Certificate in Aquaculture VET program, because

... it attracted some people that were looking at developing their resumes rather than developing the actual student growth in aquaculture.

In all sites, continuity of human resources was linked to the degree of community ownership of the school and its initiatives. Because of the sense of community ownership, established programs, such as VET-in-schools programs, are likely to continue long after school staff involved in implementing and developing them have moved on.

In Meander, the situation regarding continuity of the community online access centre is slightly different. The centre began as community driven and managed initiative, housed in, and strongly supported by, the school. Recognising the limitations of the community's very small human resource base, it has been proposed by the online access centre coordinator that the school take over the running of the centre. It is believed that the school, as a key constant in such a small community, will provide the necessary continuity of resources and leadership required to ensure the sustainability of this important community initiative.

- Effective leaders within schools and communities capitalise on opportunities provided by policy, that fit with their visions for their school and community.

Findings indicated that systemic factors, in particular the policy and practices of Commonwealth and State Government departments responsible for education, training, youth and rural issues, influenced the nature and extent of schools' contributions to their communities. For example, in Cooktown, there are two Commonwealth-funded programs in operation, designed to facilitate collaborative community development initiatives: the Priority Country Area Program (PCAP, also known as Country Area Program in some States), and the Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) program. The programs operate on a school cluster basis, including Cooktown school and community, and several smaller, neighbouring Indigenous and non-Indigenous schools and communities. By combining their resources, the PCAP and ASSPA committees, in collaboration with the P & F from Cooktown State School, have developed and run several workshops for the benefit of students, parents and the wider community. As the following extract illustrates, the PCAP initiative was seen to complement other community initiatives designed to give the community more control over its future:

I think we need to work on our leadership, we need to have a more dynamic leadership if we want to move forward any more ... I think PCAP is actually helping a lot with those issues because we're providing ... [parent workshops which are] basically community development stuff ...

By contrast, Meander Primary School, which has made a conscious effort to incorporate Aboriginal culture into its school programs, has allowed ASSPA funding to lapse. It was felt that the program did not enhance existing initiatives put in place by the school, and some concern was expressed regarding ASSPA funding as a potential source of division and exploitation.

A good example of State level policy supporting the further development of school-community partnerships, comes from Western Australia. The State's Office of Youth Affairs funds and supports several programs aimed at facilitating youth and community linkages, including the introduction of Youth Advisory Councils in a number of rural communities, and implementation of the cadets in high schools scheme statewide. The linkages facilitated and supported by the Office of Youth Affairs aligned closely with the many other school-community linkages that have been formed in Margaret River, and also aligned closely with the school-community partnership vision of the Margaret River Senior High School. Because these initiatives closely reflected the vision of the school and community, and because of the culture within Margaret River of making the most of every opportunity, Margaret River was the first community to develop a Youth Advisory Council and one of the forerunners of the cadets-in-high-schools scheme.

Most schools and communities reported ways of accommodating policy restrictions without having to compromise their vision. For example, in Cooktown the school challenged government policy and practice that did not offer sufficient flexibility to allow them to fully develop the *Step Ahead* VET program as a community vision. As a result, the school was the catalyst for one national funding body's change of policy. This came about because the school had involved and worked with the funding body closely during the implementation of the VET program, and had demonstrated a clear need for policy change. Because of this relationship, the school enjoyed initial and ongoing support at a government level for the *Step Ahead* program.

- Systemic issues, such as legislative requirements relating to community use of school facilities, which recognise the importance of rural schools to their communities, facilitate school-community linkages.

It was expected that there would be instances of factors such as school insurance restrictions, or other legislative requirements, that would hinder the development of school-community linkages. Overall, the findings indicate that various State Department of Education policies on issues such as community use of school facilities, were supportive and encouraging of school-community linkages, and provided some degree of flexibility to school Principals in their implementation of the policy. For example, the extensive school-community linkages in Margaret River were supported by appropriate policy from the Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA), which stated that:

It is Government policy to encourage and support the use of school resources by the wider community. Ideally, community use of schools should occur as widely as is consistent with the educational objectives of the school and should take account of the needs of the community (EDWA, Community Use of School Facilities Policy Guidelines, June 1997).

The policy contains guidelines for risk management, and recommends that appropriate liability insurance coverage should be taken out by community groups using the school, if they have the capacity to do so. Formal guidelines include a licencing agreement to be signed the Principal and community representative, containing an indemnity clause in respect of 'the Principal, the Minister for Education and all employees of the Minister for Education'.

Although there were no examples of legislative or policy requirements seriously hindering the formation of school-community linkages, in some sites there were examples of such requirements

slowing down the process or making it difficult to extend linkages across the community. This is typified by the following extract from Cowell, which describes how occupational health and safety requirements have restricted the extent of participation in school-community working bees:

I mean times have changed a bit I mean there's all this occupational health and safety bit comes into it now and that's created a lot more problems than what we used to do 10 or 15 years ago, we are not allowed to do now

- Effective policy implementation entails a bottom-up approach, which builds upon and develops existing relationships within the community.

Findings from the study indicated that policies which were introduced in a 'bottom up' fashion, taking into account the characteristics of the school community, the maturity of the school-community relationship, and the extent and strength of existing relationships within the community, are more likely to be effective. In this way, policy is responsible for formalising and further developing school-community linkages, rather than initiating them. For example, in Meander the community had enjoyed considerable input into school governance for some time before the introduction of the State government's school council policy. The introduction of the policy was generally well received as it supported and formalised established practices. In Margaret River, the school council policy had been in place for some time, but had not stimulated full community participation in school governance. It was not until a conflict arose between school administration and the parent body, that the community could see a need (purpose) for greater involvement in school decisionmaking, as the following extract illustrates:

... out of that sense of frustration on our part there came a suggestion from one of our parents that maybe it would be a good idea if we could have a voice on the [school council] to stop that sort of thing ... what was perhaps initially ... a point of difference became a catalyst for some very positive change.

In another example, an informal school cluster arrangement had existed between Cowell and several neighbouring schools for several years, before the cluster arrangement was formalised in 2000. There are now plans to extend the scope of the cluster, to maximise educational outcomes, resource sharing, and staff professional development activities.

In contrast to Cowell, there were concerns from the Cooktown site that the Cook school cluster was not effective in facilitating relationships between Cooktown and the Wujal Indigenous community, which is serviced by the Bloomfield River State School. Reasons cited for this included the fact that inhabitants of Wujal had tribal allegiances with those further south in Mossman, and not with those in Cooktown and surrounding areas. The other reason cited was the community's sense of physical isolation from other schools in the cluster, due to the poor state of the road, which left them completely cut off during the wet season.

### ***Other issues***

- Publicity of effective school-community linkages consolidates and strengthens the school's relationship with its community.

Principals from each of the focal schools recognised the value and importance of publicity of their school and its programs, both within the community and further afield. They displayed entrepreneurial and marketing skills which they used to enhance the school's reputation and status. Many opportunities for publicity were carefully planned, and a number of opportunities involved the whole school community (Principal, staff, parents, students), working together. A good example of this is the support provided by parents, staff and wider community members when Cowell Area School participates in rural field days, on the Eyre Peninsula and elsewhere within the State.

Outcomes of positive publicity of school-community linkages were positive perceptions of the school by staff, students and parents. These positive perceptions influenced the decision of some

parents to send their children to rural schools, rather than to boarding schools in larger regional or metropolitan areas, thus increasing the viability of some curriculum options in rural schools. Positive perceptions of the school also influenced the transfer decisions of teachers, in that in almost all sites many of the staff were in schools because they had requested to be there (that is, they had requested a transfer because of the school's reputation or the desirable lifestyle of the community). This facilitated a positive attitude of staff and stimulated involvement with the community. With increased student numbers and curriculum offerings, and motivated and enthusiastic staff, the schools displayed an increased capacity to contribute to their community. The other significant outcome of positive publicity of school-community linkages has been an increase in individual and community pride and sense of identity, and in community self-efficacy. This is typified by the following extract from Cooktown, which is talking about the effects of widespread publicity of its *Step Ahead* VET program:

Oh the enormous personal and professional pride for being associated with it, the fact that it was recognised by a national organisation like [the Commonwealth Government funding body], gave enormous sort of kudos to the people involved and ... they felt good about themselves. So self-esteem of everybody increased, it was a winner and everybody ... wants to be part of the winning team ... (Participant 19 Qld).

- Rural economic conditions influence the extent to which rural schools are able to contribute to their communities.

All of the communities in the study are, to some extent, subject to fluctuating economic conditions in terms of climate and markets. In Walla Walla, where the focal school was St Paul's, a private, fee-paying school, this was seen as a disadvantage by some. Because of a declining rural economy, a number of former students were unable to afford the school fees to send their children to St Paul's. There was some indication that this created tension within the community and reduced the school's capacity to contribute to the local and family community. However, in Cowell, difficult economic conditions were seen to favour the school to some extent, in that farmers who might have otherwise sent their teenage children away to boarding school to complete their education, were forced to keep them at Cowell Area School. This allowed the school to maintain the viability of a number of senior secondary courses, and to demonstrate to its community that it had the capability to cater for all students, regardless of their academic abilities and aspirations. This is illustrated in the following extract:

... because of the down turn in the rural economy ... when there's a drought, you tend to keep the Years 10, 11 and 12 students. Often in a very good year, or after a series of good years, parents tend to send their kids away to boarding school for a part of that senior secondary time, but I do believe that in recent years we've been able to prove that those students who do stay and study Years 11 and 12, can do very very well ... here a couple of years ago out of the eight Year 12 students we had, six went to university, one repeated some subjects at Year 13 and the other one got a traineeship, so if the student is inclined, they tend to be able to go into that academic field.

The need to provide opportunities for senior secondary students also fostered the development of closer linkages between Cowell Area School and its community, as well as between Cowell and other neighbouring communities in the Eastern Eyre Peninsula.

### ***Vehicles for school contribution to rural communities***

- Schools which have a balance between events-based and ongoing linkages are well placed to contribute effectively to their communities.

Each of the focal schools in our study had consciously worked to develop relationships with a wide range of community groups and sectors, and to contribute to their communities in a variety of ways. For example, in Margaret River, the largest of our study sites, the school had forged linkages with local business, the viticulture industry, local government, voluntary groups such as

the State Emergency Services, the health sector, other schools within the region, service clubs, the RSL, the elderly and the disabled, to name a few. Schools in smaller sites had developed links with at least three different community groups or sectors. In each site there was a balance between one-off or events-based linkages (for example, the school fair, the school bush dance, participation in the Anzac Day parade) and ongoing linkages (for example, sharing of resources and facilities, the operation of VET-in-schools programs). It would seem that this balance is desirable, so as to involve as many diverse community groups as possible in the school. In small rural communities, such as Walla Walla and Meander, the combination of event-based (for example, the school production or school bush dance) and ongoing linkages (for example, the participation of students from St Paul's College in Walla Walla sporting teams) take on a particular significance, as key sources of social activity and social bonding within the community.

- VET-in-schools programs are significant vehicles for establishing and maintaining strong links between rural schools and their communities.

Four of the five case study sites had some form of VET-in-schools program in operation. There was evidence to suggest that the setting up of these programs in each site had contributed greatly to the formation of linkages with diverse community groups, as well as to the formation of partnerships with external funding bodies and training providers. This facilitated an outward-looking approach and allowed the community to access new ideas and explore new opportunities. For example, in Walla Walla the school actively sought partnerships with a variety of external training providers, including one provider in Victoria, to meet the differing needs of its VET students. This outward-looking focus was important in opening up the community to the importance of seeking new ideas and embracing change.

Most of the VET-in-schools sites had management committees comprised of school and a wide cross-section of school and community representatives. Interestingly, there was very little evidence of student representation on these committees. The committees played an important role in building community ownership of the VET program, ensuring community needs and concerns were addressed, and ensuring sustainability of programs despite changes in school personnel. What is important about these committees is that they were not token groups: they modelled real decisionmaking power and distributive leadership practices.

Evidence from the study illustrates that the process of implementing a VET-in-schools program provided communities with further opportunities to explore their own capabilities and potential for collective action. This is typified in the following extract, which is talking about the management committee for Cooktown State School's *Step Ahead* VET program:

It's [*Step Ahead*] certainly a catalyst ... it brought [together] as a committee, a group of people with similar interests and ideas and ambitions, I suppose, and that gave that base then to look at other [community initiatives] ... the conversation will lead itself to different opportunities and ideas and options ... (Participant 16 Qld).

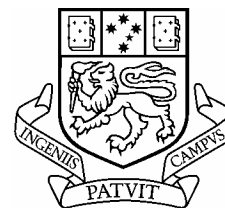
## Where to from here?

This report presents a summary of key project findings to date. It is certainly not an end point, and the findings themselves raise as many questions as they answer. Over the coming months, in consultation with the project Reference Group and with community members from each of our five study sites, the issues presented in this report will be discussed further. From these discussions, a series of recommendations will be drafted. Without wishing to pre-empt the consultative process, the researchers suggest that any discussion of the way in which school-community linkages can be enhanced, will most likely include consideration of some or all of the following implications:

- Human resources implications for schools and communities
- Financial resources implications for schools and communities
- Systemic implications (e.g. as schools forge relationships with a variety of community sectors, particularly with key government sectors such as health, to what extent do governments need to develop policy and practices which facilitate a whole-of-government approach to provision of services in rural communities?)
- Professional development implications for school Principals and teaching staff
- Training implications for community members (including training in financial management practices related to external funding bodies)
- Implications of the change in the nature and extent of parental and student involvement in school decisionmaking (e.g. do school councils and P & F groups comprised of largely white, middle class, professional people, with well developed skills in negotiation and meeting procedure, run the risk of disempowering other community groups which differ from the status quo in terms gender, ethnicity or socioeconomic grouping?)



## Appendix 6: Community meetings



UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia

31 May 2001

# INVITATION

Dear

***You are invited to participate in a community meeting at which we will present findings from our study into School contribution to rural communities: Leadership issues.***

This will be a good opportunity for you to have some input into framing recommendations that will help schools and communities develop better partnerships.

<b>Date:</b>	Friday 22 June 2001
<b>Time:</b>	4.00-5.30pm
<b>Place:</b>	Freycinet Inn

*Light refreshments will be served  
after the meeting*

Regards

*Susan Johns and Libby Prescott*

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**RSVP:** For catering purposes, it would be appreciated if you would advise of your intention to attend the meeting. Please complete and return this slip to the Margaret River Senior High School office by **Friday 15 June.**

I ..... will be attending *the School contribution to rural communities* meeting at the Freycinet Inn on Friday 22 June 2001.

*SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMUNITY MEETINGS*

MEANDER PRIMARY SCHOOL 29/5/01

1. **Community needs school as much as school needs community:** School is centre for cultural identity for rural areas: To Govt/Ed Dept – need to be aware that there is a need to keep the school to keep the community. Larger centralised schools may seem to be cost effective on the face of it, but this causes all sorts of other social problems for students. The costs of overcoming these problems may outweigh financially, and certainly outweigh socially, the other savings. The extra community input from rural communities may also counter financial advantages from centralisation.
2. **Involving teachers in community:** Difficulties for school leadership fitting in to rural community: Need constructive community support to help staff overcome problems. A broad-based school council could take this role. There can be a problem with new teachers and those who commute to a school not becoming part of the community and not being aware of community resources. Schools need to hold an induction for all new teachers (incl principal) showing them the assets and resources of the area so that they feel a part of the community. Negative community perceptions can be overcome by community members getting to know the staff in person. Community needs to have feeling that staff are part of community.
3. **Publicity:** Need to celebrate successes of school and publicise these.
4. **Community ownership a pride in school:** School needs to be flexible and open to ideas from the broader community. Needs to reach out and give students and community a “world view” (cf trips to Parliament House for students).
5. **Roles of School Council & P&F:** Has been a resurgence in role of P&F as schools always need extra money.
6. **School/community funding priorities:** Hard times (financially or otherwise) can be a positive catalyst for community involvement...motivate the community.

## COOKTOWN AREA SCHOOL 18/6/01

1. **Need for financial continuity:** to sustain projects funding needs to be ongoing beyond seeding grants. A 3 year sunset clause for government funded projects is out of kilter with businesses which work on 5 year plans and no business expects to make a profit for at least the first 5 years. It is difficult for projects to become self-sustaining in small rural communities with few non-government resources. If a program is successful and is deemed to be so by whatever criteria are set, it should be financially sustained by external government funding: eg a VET program should be evaluated and the decision made as to whether it is continued or not.
2. **How to measure outcomes?** DETYA data used for evaluation needs to be both qualitative and quantitative. Going on raw numbers doesn't give a full picture of success or otherwise. The definition of 'outcomes' in this context needs to be broad: eg In some cases the 'graduation rate' is an inappropriate measure where just getting young people to come to school a couple of days a week may be a positive outcome in some communities. Key outcomes may not be just numeric but social in community gain. *(Perhaps there is a need to revise the actual aims of VET and how to measure these- is it simply to get young people employed or is it more than this? If more, how can these qualitative outcomes be measured?)*
3. **Government & Departmental policy:** this needs to be flexible and willing to give ideas a try, though there is little point in trialing something without the money to sustain the program if it is successful. In trying to fit guidelines good original ideas may be lost. Forced 'innovations' may occur when these changes may not be necessary. Staff are expected to make submissions for funding in their spare time. There is a tendency to lose sight of what the real aim/purpose of a school should be. Should staff be finding resourcing or implementing programs? Teachers are taken away from their core job. There is a need to employ someone to develop grant applications. *(Should this be the VET coordinators job? Or possibly train the admin staff or bursar? If so should there be training/professional development for this? Do ECEF allow for the cost of making applications in the funding? Should there be just one pot of money for rural schools rather than a lot of little time-consuming pots all requiring different applications?)*
4. **Bending the rules:** schools need to be innovative with their resourcing eg ASSPA funding is shared by all kids, not just indigenous kids so that they are 'working together and sharing resources'. This avoided positive discrimination policies causing division in the community. Most schools bend the rules anyway, to fit their specific needs. This is a waste of time and a huge risk for a project if assessors want to play by the rules. There needs to be greater flexibility in the policy itself to allow for regional variations/needs so that communities, schools and government agents aren't forced to do so. Each community needs to have its uniqueness recognised and assessed on an individual basis. Guidelines are too rigid and inflexible. *(The whole issue of writing policy needs to be considered. Perhaps rural schools need to be given greater flexibility in accreditation.)*
5. **Intellectual property rights:** Schools should have intellectual property rights over ideas or programs established and get financial credit and recognition for this if other schools capitalise on the idea. This could go some way toward sustaining such schemes. There is a need for recognition and reward within education departments for schools developing innovative ideas.

6. **Rural communities:** better outcomes are achieved if rural communities take the initiative and responsibility for these. There is a need to cultivate mutual awareness between school and community.
7. **Getting an idea underway:** This can only be achieved with community backing. Government, school and community need to be involved from the start. eg With *Step Ahead*, community members give continuity when school staffing changes. Schools and communities need to realise that parent bodies and the community can achieve far more than school staff in changing policy and in getting bureaucracy to listen. School Councils are an obvious forum but these need to be more active in getting ideas out into the community.
8. **Parental involvement:** schools need to actively integrate parents, particularly those not normally involved. This is best achieved by personal contact, going out to them in places where they are comfortable rather than expecting them to come to the school. Like good hunters, schools need to “go where they’re drinking”. Need to make schools more accessible to people, break down barriers eg instead of a meeting have a barbeque or other social event.
9. **Staff continuity:** this is particularly important for Indigenous students and the female support is especially so for Indigenous girls. The role of the teacher aide is important here. Ancillary staff are a vital link between school and community, tending to be long term local residents and less threatening to community members with bad school experiences or little education.

MARGARET RIVER SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL 22/6/01

1. **Valuing and retaining youth in the community:** Youth can be retained by providing all levels of education locally. Every rural community needs to be able to provide education up to tertiary level to keep ownership of their youth. This means a greater role for rural schools by providing for partnerships with all levels. Clustering of various levels may facilitate this process. Education must be seen as an essential service, not an economically rationalised service. If youth choose to study elsewhere, schools and community need to develop a program for preparing students and their families for coping with life while undertaking tertiary studies in the city- re accommodation, financial survival, 'hormones' and study. Federal Govt Youth allowance rules discriminate against rural youth.
2. **Shared vision needs to be community driven:** Devolution of decision making to local education level through govt policy is essential. It empowers local involvement and allows for shared vision. Local management of services encourages non-school employees and students to be involved in decision making. Schools need greater autonomy over key decisions.
3. **Valuing and using skills of community members esp. retirees in school:** Create a skills database (directory of available human resources) for the school re parents and community members. This can be a two-way street in relationships, building confidence and focusing on expertise and skills people are willing to share. This can key in untapped skills as school resources using people with time, patience and life skills who are increasingly retiring in or to rural areas. Gives retirees a purpose and a greater understanding of youth. Need regular programs for this like the LAP reading program at MRSH. Publicise 'local heroes' by recognising, promoting and using talents of people in the community. *(More important for larger schools where community is not always aware of people's skills.. School's role as mediator of talents needs to go further and make use of the skills...bring parents in for curriculum planning?...possible role for subcommittee of P&C or employ a school/comm liaison person-boundary crosse- to coordinate.)*
4. **Building school/community liaison...an open school in an open community:** Putting up a school sign saying "We invite you..." or "Visitors welcome and encouraged..." *(School design/ refurbishment; parents/community need to work with architects-as part of their brief- and dept to get location and design of schools right.)* Recommend further joint use of school community facilities. This will lead to mutual respect eg through school art/theatre/sport productions involving the community as well as career education.
5. **Self sufficiency in developing community leaders:** by accelerating devolution of school decision making to the local community to address the needs of all stakeholders in the education system.
6. **Promote parental involvement and participation through a pro-active school:** Have parent year group representatives to broaden parental involvement, liaise with other parents/teachers and welcome newcomers. Target specific people in community and ask them directly to take part in a particular project. The school needs to take the initiative primarily through good leadership. A joint staff/community "getting to know you" function at the start of the year followed up later in the year. "It takes a village to raise a child"- requires cooperative responsibility eg truancy- parents don't necessarily know but others could ask students why they are not at school.

7. **Pivotal role of school principal/ retention of staff in rural areas:** supported by good morale among staff and suitable accommodation for these in country towns. Need financial incentives to get staff to go to and stay in rural areas. A school/ comm. liaison person could also help with housing and making new teachers feel welcome. A 'new staff' function for staff from all schools, state and private, in the community would also help. This could be held at a different school throughout the year or moved away from the school and initiated/organised by community groups. The principal needs to create practical opportunities for boundary crossers in terms of finances and time- to free them up if they are school employees.
8. **How to measure outcomes of school/comm. programs:** this needs to change to take into account longer term, non-economic and non-quantitative outcomes. eg Retiree working with youth in reading program said that developing his reading skills was the least important outcome of the program. Can actively pursue and measure success by subsequent long term participation.
9. **Publicity for school programs:** schools need to build active and planned promotion into programs. This publicity needs to be ongoing...it's easy for new ideas to get publicity but harder for ongoing projects.
10. **Government & Departmental policy:** the community actively subverts and manipulates the relevant government systems and education management hierarchy to suit its own purpose. Schools need to get the community onside to get action. The community going to government achieves more than the school ever would on its own. Increase in power of parents via school councils and P&F is relevant here.

COWELL AREA SCHOOL 25/6/01

1. **Lack of continuity of funding:** Funding should be reviewed after a set period and before the end of the project to justify continuity of the program. Schools need to have a long term overview and to identify specific outcomes required of the project and seek funding for all aspects of each project (eg for capital works AND staffing) as one is inadequate without the other. Difficulty is for schools to find people with skills to apply for funding.
2. **Maintain a good relationship with oyster growers to maintain VET program:** the school needs to keep the aquaculture committee going, with a broad range of community members represented and targeted, including a local govt rep and community members with specific skills. Liaison needs to be expanded to include other educational bodies or industry groups, eg Flinders University as a research establishment. School needs to build itself up as a resource for industry so the reliance is mutual and beneficial to both the school and growers.
3. **Retaining staff in rural areas:** Department needs to encourage rural students to train as teachers so there is a greater chance of their returning to that community. *(eg. rural scholarships, publicity of advantages of working in rural schools, young graduates to talk at rural schools and career expos, target year 11-12 students and education students, incorporate rural education module and pracs in teacher training courses, greater support for professional development for rural teachers, ed students go to uni for 2 years then do supply teaching at rural schools while finishing degree online etc).* Short term contracts for teachers need to be abolished for rural schools in SA. Area schools staffed the same as R-12 schools for SSO (auxiliary) staff but their requirements are greater.
4. **Disruptive effect of students coming from outside the community with different (inappropriate) values:** Encourage or facilitate a way that incoming students can build or be involved in a community project that they can take pride in and so absorb community values. Get young people involved in the community through sports or part-time work-the school may be able to help facilitate this. Governing council or SRC could organise casual get together early in the year to allow new students (esp secondary) to meet classmates and make friends. Possibly establish a mentoring program for retired people and youth. A school/comm liaison person could set this up?
5. **Barrier for parents/community members coming into school:** Particularly a problem with the lack of time due to work etc. Government can change the content of education to allow for greater flexibility in timetabling (staff work shifts to keep the school open later for senior students and adults with jobs who wish to undertake further studies). School councils could establish a skills register to get parents/comm members with something to offer into school. Personal approach would work best rather than a mail out as this creates an obligation to become involved. Government and community could jointly fund a **school/community liaison person** to build relationships between these groups. This person would link various groups and not be seen as representing just one.

## ST PAUL'S COLLEGE, WALLA WALLA 27/6/01

1. **Increasing government awareness of the 'rurality' issue: what is a rural school?** Education departments, DETYA etc need to have a particular department/area of focus to target and serve rural schools as there is a lack of understanding of specific local rural issues eg school bus access problems, living away from home allowance etc. In defining a rural school, the drawing area as well as its location should be considered.
2. **Rural school/community peak body:** this needs to be developed to take issues to government and network for the general benefit of rural schools and their communities.
3. **School/community liaison person:** This position could be developed in conjunction with Local Govt to liaise between all schools in a LG area and groups in the community. Regional Solutions funding/local govt and schools etc could combine to fund this position.
4. **Church linking school and community:** need formal links to be established for value building: social welfare, crisis intervention, pastoral care, communication facilitation between school/church/community, building self esteem.
5. **Students in community aid work:** Students can be directly involved in community aid work eg meals on wheels etc with benefits for intergenerational trust. (*Insurance issues?*)
6. **Boarding School bond with parents:** good relationships are built between parents of boarders and other boarding students helping to make parents feel welcome in the school. This strong relationship forms a strong foundation for work with the rest of the community.
7. **Private schools and the community:** It is perhaps even more important for private schools to interact with the local community to gain community acceptance and support as there may be resentment of them as 'institutions for the wealthy'. Having staff live locally and take part in local activities is very important in establishing that relationship...again there is a problem with staff living outside the local community (Albury).



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