CONSTRUCTING RURAL PRINCIPALSHIP:
THIRDSpace AND THREE WORLDS

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“…we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities.”

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Abstract

The role of the rural principal is complex and multi-layered. This is made apparent using qualitative research methods to explicate and analyse how principals construct their roles.

Rural Australia has a problematic history when considered from the perspective of attracting and retaining qualified educational leaders. Many kinds of incentives have been used. All of them are of a compensatory nature. One of the impacts is that the professional demands and specialisations of rural and remote education have often been masked and diminished.

Principals of rural schools spend large amounts of time creating and seeking out opportunities that have the potential to disturb and shift the status quo towards some other state which they believe is likely to be more beneficial for students, staff and the community. They also draw upon the experiences and advice of colleagues, and use various schemes or codes for managing multi-dimensional situations.

In terms of Thirdspace discourse, principals construct their roles by making or finding space to facilitate the possibility of new ideas emerging. In particular, they frequently construct or use established types of social spaces, both within and beyond the school, as contexts for this to occur. The qualities of the social spaces they create or find in turn have a bearing on what might emerge in terms of leading and managing the tension between status quo and change. From the perspective of Three Worlds, principals of rural schools engage in a continuous process of knowledge making, essentially driven out of, and by, the contexts and spatiality of their roles.

The uniqueness of rural contexts and spatiality as derived from Thirdspace, has the potential to reframe rural principalship from one of comparative evaluation with others, like urban, to one where rural principalship asserts its own legitimacy. The differentiated treatment of males and females, particularly during the entry phase of a principal’s appointment, is probably of most significance in terms of impacting on how principals go about the day-to-day work of constructing their roles. Gender as a basis
for differentiated treatment of educational leaders permeates and pervades the thinking and actions of female principals, and intrudes upon their private time.

In contrast to what female principals have to contend with as they construct their roles, the privileging of ‘maleness and school leadership’ appears to be a matter which is taken for granted. A consequence of this is that males enter into school, community, and school-community contexts, in comparatively unproblematic, uncontested ways. On the other hand, females not only have to contend with the differentiation, they also have to devise and weave into everything they do, strategies for managing and minimising it. Community and gender combine to form a zoom lens that focuses in to expose, to reveal and to portray role construction by ‘women at work’ for scrutiny and judgement.

The implications for policy arising from my research mainly centre on the preparation of principals for rural schools and the subsequent professional support available to them once they have taken up a position. The dimension of a rural principal’s role that stands out from all of the others is the one that locates them in a context of high visibility and low anonymity.

This study shows that there would likely be benefit in education systems and employment authorities having a policy which would ensure that those who aspire to being a rural principal, as well as those who find themselves in such roles by default, have access to extended, adequately resourced in-depth study of rurality and rural communities.

Increasing knowledge and understanding of how principals of rural schools construct their roles has the potential to create significant benefit for rural principals themselves, for rural students and rural communities, and for system policy makers and managers.
I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

SIGNED:

DATE:
There are a number of people I would like to thank for their guidance, support and encouragement in writing this thesis. To my supervisor, Professor Colin MacMullin, I express my thanks for his insights, his encouragement as I explored principalship and new spaces, and for his critical and timely feedback. To Judith, my partner, my grateful thanks for her love, patience, understanding and advice on drafting as I undertook the work, and for keeping me balanced. To the principals who participated in the research, my very sincere thanks for sharing their insights with me and for making time available for this. To my colleagues in the School of Education at Flinders University, South Australia for their encouragement to complete the task once commenced. Finally, my thanks to all of my family for their advice, love and support.
Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the focus of my research, to outline the research basis and research methodology, to present an overview of the literature review undertaken for the research, and to introduce the theoretical work that I use to present my findings.

I have been interested in rural education since my first appointment to a country school as a teacher on Eyre Peninsula, South Australia, in 1967. Later I became the principal of an Area School (Reception to Year 12 (R–12), also known in other parts of Australia as a District School) with an enrolment of around 900 students. This was followed by leadership of a large urban R–12 school, and then appointments which incorporated state wide responsibility for country schools and children’s services in South Australia.

Framing the research context
Rural education in South Australia (and Australia more broadly) has a long and somewhat problematic history, especially when considered from the perspective of attracting and retaining qualified staff. Many kinds of incentives have been used, and continue to be used, to attract and retain staff for rural and remote schools. All of them are essentially compensatory in nature and include extra salary increments, subsidised housing, additional leave entitlements and potentially accelerated promotion prospects. One of the impacts of this approach to staffing rural schools is that the complexities, as well as challenges and opportunities, of it are often diminished or displaced as priority areas for in-depth consideration by education authorities. Put another way, the day-to-day policy and operational pressures of staffing rural schools appear to leave little or no space for considering ‘other’ — other ways of conceptualising provision, other ways of meeting service entitlements and needs, other ways of arranging access, other ways of analysing and forming deep and contextually informed understandings of principalship, and so forth.
In the early part of the twentieth century, the situation for government schools in South Australia was described as one where:

More than half [of the 1,010] were one-room schools [read rural for the majority of these] staffed by mostly uncertified teachers…[and] discussion about rural schools, teachers and their practice was muted but rarely were they seen to be achieving the same standards as urban teachers and larger schools. (Whitehead, 2004/2005, pp.293–295)

Later, one of Australia’s most rigorous and extensive enquiries into education — *Education in South Australia 1969-1970*, also often referred to as the Karmel Enquiry — devoted a substantial section of the report (Government of South Australia, 1971) to the issue of preparing and appointing qualified staff for rural and remote areas of the state. Like Whitehead, it too found much ‘unfinished business’ with raising the standards of preparation of teachers and principals (then referred to as headmasters) for rural schools.

More recently, in 1987, the then Commonwealth Schools Commission presented a report to the Minister for Employment, Education and Training of the day, the Hon J.S. Dawkins, entitled *Schooling in Rural Australia* (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988). The Introduction to the report (p.1) continues the theme of the problematic nature of staffing country schools, this time on an Australia wide scale:

Attracting staff and maintaining reasonable staffing continuity can be difficult in schools in remote areas. Staff in these schools can find that their preparation for teaching [and principalship] in remote schools and the extent of professional support available are insufficient.

In developing and arguing for changes to the way teachers are prepared for rural and remote schools, *Schooling in Rural Australia* (p.139) argues that “teachers [and also principals] in rural schools face special challenges and conditions not necessarily experienced by other[s]…”. The report (p.140) also concludes that “a successful adjustment to a rural appointment…includes the preparation for teaching [and principalship also] prior to appointment”.

Kyle (1990, p.43) captures many of the historic and, I would argue, significant elements of the contemporary situation, which provide other insights about the contextual and problematic dimensions of rural education:

Rural schooling, and how it was established, unquestionably reflected the bush myth. It was a romanticized and sanitized version of schooling which ignored much of the harsh reality of everyday country living. In the rush to
canonize the essential goodness of the ‘bush’ character little attention was paid to developing an educational policy which truly reflected the complex social practice that defined people’s lives.

In addition, recent government reports and enquiries, including the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (2000a & 2000b), update and continue the problematic theme of education in many rural contexts in Australia.

**Framing the research focus**

While it is widely recognised that the role of school principal is a pivotal one in education (Stoll & Fink 1996; Crowther, Hann & Andrews 2002; Polischuk 2002; Barnett, Marsh & Craven nd; MacGilchrist 2004; Mulford & Johns 2004; Myers & Reed 2004; Peters & Le Cornu, 2004), there appears to be little research undertaken and reported on the leadership and management of schools from the perspective of the day-to-day lived and working experiences of practising principals, and particularly principals in rural contexts. Much of the literature on principalship focuses on the components of the role, and the relative emphasis that needs to be assigned to each component to achieve particular kinds of teaching and learning milieus and outcomes.

Further, since the mid-1980s, there has been a growing focus on local management of schools that seems to have intensified a search for approaches and styles of leadership and management more suited to localised but substantially market-oriented contexts than to regulated and bureaucratic contexts (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992 & 1998). There has also been some focus on the implications of local management for issues like social justice, and the tensions generated between schools acting as agents of social, economic, political and cultural reproduction versus reconstruction and renewal.

In summary, there are five main findings from research on rural education and leadership that lead to the focus for my research. Firstly, much of the story of rural education from the perspective of staffing has been problematic and characterised by various attempts to get principals and teachers to work and live in rural communities. Secondly, the centrality of the role of the principal in education is now widely recognised. Thirdly, there has been extensive research done about the components of effective and efficient educational leadership. Fourthly, and linked to this, there has been, and continues to be, a focus on principalship for specific purposes like local management of schools. Fifthly, there has
been some focus on issues that principals in small rural schools have to contend and deal with (Chalker, 1999; Lester, 2003). However, in the existing field of rural education as prescribed by the five findings summarised above, there has been little investigation into how individual principals of rural schools actually construct their roles — that is, their lived experiences negotiating and doing the work they are appointed to do.

The research gap which I have identified is a problem worthy of investigation from at least two perspectives. Firstly, it is commonly, though I believe wrongly, assumed that rural principalship is a comparatively unproblematic and straightforward kind of an undertaking, suitable for novices ‘to learn the game’. Secondly, the fact there is a research gap reinforces the belief I have alluded to and from this, contributes to under-valuing the complexity of living and working in contexts of high surveillance and low anonymity, such as prevails in rural towns and communities. Neither of these perspectives ‘does justice’ to those who are in the role of a rural principal or aspiring to it, nor does it assign an appropriate level of recognition and professional status to rural principals. Consequently, a study that aspires to fill the research gap as identified, has the potential to help change the status and recognition of the profession of rural principalship, and from this, contribute towards enhancing the attraction, and retention, of leading educators to rural schools.

Research question

The question for this thesis then is how do principals of rural schools construct their roles? Fontana and Frey (2005, p.698) define how as “the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life” and “the traditional whats” as “the activities of everyday life”. These statements encapsulate a duality which not only permeates leadership and management but also throws into sharp relief the distinguishing features of each. The whats are the components or elements referred to earlier that are readily found in textbooks and articles on leadership and management, like decision-making, planning, coordination, budgeting, meeting, visioning exercises, organisational re-structuring, conflict resolution, and so on. Compared with the what of the duality, where there is almost a surfeit of material, the how dimensions of principalship require further investigation. By focussing on how, opportunity is created for some new insights and understandings to emerge which have the potential to enhance both the preparation of aspiring rural principals and the professional support available to current rural
principals. Enhancements may be achieved through the availability of better knowledge about how principals of rural schools construct their roles.

The term ‘construct’ in the research question has been chosen in an attempt to convey a strong sense of engagement and building something — in this case, the role of principal of a rural school. However, while the term construct is not used in the ‘pure theory sense’ of literature on constructivism, there is a sense in which constructivism in terms of “a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on experiences, individuals construct understanding of their reality” (Crawford, 2003, p.21 citing Woolfolk, 2004), is germane. As well, Piaget’s insights about individuals interacting with their contexts to produce knowledge and the complex balancing that occurs between tendencies of organisation and adaptation (Crawford, 2003, p.23), are also helpful in amplifying the meaning of the term ‘construct’ as it is used herein.

**Research design**

The design for investigating my research question comprises:

- two strands of enquiry
- three time phases
- a research dimension, gender.

**Enquiry strands**

The two enquiry strands of my research, derived from the main research question, are:

- *how* do principals of rural schools construct their role in terms of three content domains — learning, organising, and visioning? and,

- *how* do principals of rural schools construct their role in terms of three contexts — school, community, and the school and community interface?

The content domains and the contexts prescribe the locational and conceptual aspects for investigating how principals of rural schools construct their roles. Each of the content domains contains several elements to provide structure and focus for information and data collection and to catalyse other possibilities. Specifically, the learning content domain incorporates curriculum, teaching, assessment, student relationships, and school ethos. The organising content domain includes policies, structures, decision-making, staffing,
departmental links and interactions, resources and budgets, planning and communication. The visioning content domain was included to give opportunity for research participants to focus on ‘big picture’ issues, to raise matters that have a relatively long time horizon, and to explore how principals balance the particularities and immediacy of the present with the more provisional and tentative aspects of dealing with the future.

<table>
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<th>Key research question: How do principals of rural schools construct their roles?</th>
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<td><strong>Enquiry strands</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Time phases</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Specific research dimension</strong></td>
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Figure 1: Research design

Illustrated by way of questions, the context investigative strand encompasses: how do principals of rural schools construct their role within the parameters of the school for which they are legally responsible?; how do principals work with the community associated with, and which identifies with, the school to construct their leadership?; and, how do principals of rural schools construct their role in terms of the interface between school and community?

**Time phases**

The three time phases of leadership construction are Phase 1 which represents the period spanning job application, selection and appointment notification through to commencing in-situ; Phase 2, the time currently being spent in the role of principal; and Phase 3, being an imaginative reflective phase essentially focussing on ‘lessons and learnings’ about constructing the role of principal that an interviewee would take into or use to shape their approaches to another leadership appointment.
**Specific research dimension—gender**

The history and roles of women in rural education, linked with the increasing number of women being appointed principals of rural schools, means that gender needs to be included in considerations about the construction of educational leadership in such schools and their contexts (Hall, 1997; Blackmore, 1998). Perhaps more importantly, Hall (1997) argues that most of the literature on leadership is produced out of a masculine interpretation and that more needs to be known about how females understand and construct leadership. An illustration of the strength and significance of Hall’s argument in terms of incorporating gender as a dimension in this research can be found in Shafritz *et al* (2005). The book is a compendium of what is widely recognised as original/classical contributions to the discipline of organisational theory. Of the forty nine papers in the compendium, only three are authored by women. In addition, Alston (2005, p.139) argues that “gender is a critical determinant of the lived experience of small-town rural Australia”. As well, Alston (2005, p.140) asserts that it is “imperative that gender, its intersection with rurality and the discursive practices on which both are reliant be understood and incorporated into our analysis of rural communities [and our analysis of those who live and work there, like principals]”.

**Framing the research methodology**

The research methodology I have used is derived from qualitative approaches. Huberman and Miles (2002, p.305) assert that “the wider use of qualitative methods (during the past two decades) … is underpinned by the persistent requirement in social policy fields to understand complex behaviours, needs, systems and cultures”.

The primary data for the research comes from in-depth semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of principals of five different types of schools in rural South Australia, with the school selection based upon the following criteria:

- a Year R–12 school, enrolment <100, female principal, not located in a rural town;
- a Year R–12 school, enrolment >100, female principal, rural town location;
- a Year R–7 school, enrolment >100, male principal, rural town location;
- a Year R–12 school, enrolment >100, male principal, rural town location and formal education and training links with local industry;
Chapter 1: Framing the Research Study

- a Year 8–12 school, enrolment >100, male principal, rural town location.

Semi-structured interviews were used because they are an effective and ‘proven’ way “to discover how the respondent sees the world” (McCracken, 1988, p.21). The interactive aspects of the approach assisted with the collection of deep contextually- and experientially-based insights and understandings about how principals of rural schools construct their roles. This claim is made, cognizant of the caution from Fontana and Frey (2005, p.697) that “[t]he spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the answers”.

Required ethics approvals and consents were obtained prior to the commencement of interviews, which were conducted in 2006 with the principals in their schools. Verbatim transcripts of each interview were sent to each principal for amending, editing and confirming before any analysis commenced. Discussion of understandings about rural and rurality and the selection of sites for the research are presented in Chapter 3, which deals with research methods and limitations.

Framing the literature for analysis and theorising

The literature reviewed for the research, apart from the literature on qualitative-based research design, is discussed in Chapter 2. The literature is arranged in five clusters for two main reasons. Firstly, structuring the literature into clusters makes it more efficient to use. Secondly, the cluster structuring has been done to facilitate use of it by rural education policy makers and practitioners, given that one of the primary purposes of the Doctor of Education degree is “the application of knowledge in professional practice” (Flinders University, 2006). The first four clusters comprise: identifying and defining rural contexts and rurality; rural schooling; gender; and leadership. The fifth cluster of the literature review is a discussion of Soja’s (1989 & 1996) Thirdspace and Popper’s (1992 a & b) Three Worlds approach to creating knowledge, which is used as a basis to present the findings of the research and to suggest areas for further research.
Chapter 1: Framing the Research Study

Thesis structure
As already stated, Chapter 2 is a review of the literature for the research. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and the rationale for the selection of the five principals and their schools. Chapter 3 also includes a discussion of characteristics of rural contexts and some distinguishing aspects of each used for the research. Chapter 4 presents the working data derived from the interviews. It is arranged using five interview text organisers that are based upon the interview design. They are: framing into the role; vision and learning; leading and organising; community; and learnings for the next leadership position. Each interview record is preceded by a précis intended to be read like a piece of ‘rural town investigative journalism’ about how the principal seems to construct her/his role. This has been done to help make the record of the various interviews ‘live’ and, as quoted by Fontana and Frey (2005, p.717) from Ithiel de Sola Pool (1957), “[e]very interview is…an interpersonal drama with a developing plot”. Chapter 5 is an analysis and discussion of each of the interview text organisers, extracted horizontally from the data in Chapter 4. This has been done to provide ‘slices’ across the five interviews, organiser by organiser. Chapter 6 is devoted to theorising using Soja’s Thirdspace and spatiality theoretical framework and ideas, together with some of Popper’s Three Worlds model of (new) knowledge making and Chapter 7 is a brief summary of the research and presents some implications for policy and suggests areas of further research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction
This chapter reports a review of literature related to the focus of my research, arranged in five clusters of readings as stated in Chapter 1. The first cluster is understandings of rurality. This literature is significant because there are substantial differences, as well as areas of agreement, about where, what and who constitutes rural and rurality. As well, the cluster is significant because it provides the basis for selecting the rural schools for the research. The second cluster of readings essentially flows on from the first and presents considerations of rural schooling in Australia, particularly from an historical perspective. The third cluster deals with gender which is a significant issue for educational leadership in rural contexts. The fourth cluster of the literature review comprises some selections about leadership in a more general sense as it applies to education and schools. The final section of the literature review is a discussion of Soja’s (1989 & 1996) Thirdspace and Popper’s (1992a & b) Three Worlds approach to creating knowledge, as the theoretical orientation for the findings of the research, and to suggest areas for further research. Literature relevant to research methodology and rural community contexts is presented specifically in Chapter 3.

Understandings about rural and rurality
In Australia there are numerous terms commonly used to denote locations and associated characteristics that are considered to be ‘other than urban’. These include: country, regional, the bush, outback, remote, and isolated. Terms of a more vernacular kind, such as ‘the back of beyond’ and ‘the sticks’, are also used. Naming of non-urban locations occurs in countries other than Australia and especially those with very large land masses, like Africa and the United States of America, or those which are smaller in area terms but have contrasting landforms, such as Britain. In addition, there is a long tradition of scholarly work on ‘rural’ in the field of social philosophy, as represented by reference to gemeinschaft and gesellschaft (Hooper, 2001). Traditionally rural is associated with gemeinschaft because of its emphasis on individuals finding identity within the group, and gesellschaft is associated more with modern emerging urban contexts. Hooper (2001, p.1) asserts that “traditional gemeinschaft society was seen as
Chapter 2: Literature Review

the place of moral and social values whereas gesellschaft was seen as the place where these values and morals had broken down”.

Essentially there are instrumental/quantitative definitions of rural and definitions of a more nuanced and qualitative kind. These have also been referred to as the geographical approach and the sociological approach (University of Ballarat, n.d.; Whitaker 1983; Mulley 1999; Hooper 2001). Quantitative definitions of ‘rural’ place emphasis on population size and distance from large centres where there is an extensive range of human services available. Qualitative definitions on the other hand, while recognising that population size and distance are contributing elements to what constitutes ‘rural’, focus on the cultural and relational dimensions of places and people.

Mulley (1999, p.1) has documented the variation in the definitions of rural and rurality from one country to another: “At one extreme, Switzerland regards communities of 10,000 inhabitants or less as being rural, whereas in Norway communities of 200 inhabitants are defined as the rural limit”. Staying with the instrumental/quantitative approach to defining rural, some countries also factor in population density per given area and economic activity as components of their definition linked with population. Griffith (1996, p.5) however, argues that “the descriptors, rural and remote, have been shown to be so generic and so imprecisely defined that they are relatively useless terms”. This led Griffith to undertake further research to develop a services (such as education) access score, which is derived from “the population of the urban centre or locality containing the school, the distance from the school locality to the most likely accessed service centre, and the economic resources of the school population” (Jones, 2000, p8).

Hugo (2000), in a somewhat similar vein to Griffith, argues that there is much confusion about the classification of the 37.3% of the population of Australia living outside of cities with populations greater than 100,000 persons. He states that a significant amount of this “confusion regarding rural, remote and regional stems from an attempt to combine into a single classification two distinctly different conceptual elements: urban/rural and, accessibility/remoteness” (Hugo, 2000, p.1). As these are very different concepts, Hugo (2000, p.2) believes that “[a]ny attempt to classify non-metropolitan into rural and remote areas is misplaced. We need to classify areas in
terms of their urbanness/ruralness and we also need to classify them by their degree of remoteness”. Notwithstanding this, Hugo in his keynote presentation to the First National Conference on the Future of Australia’s Country Towns, uses the threshold of more than 100,000 persons to divide metropolitan areas from the rest, and within ‘the rest’, refers to two types of location differentiation: one according to the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC); the other based upon the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA). Within the ASGC, two of the classifications are pertinent to determining what constitutes rural for the purposes of this research. They are “Bounded Rural Locality — rural areas… with a population of 200–999, and Rural Balance — the remainder of the (state)” (Hugo, 2000, p.2).

Rural and remote area determinations for government schooling provision in Australia are based upon a blend of size of population centre and distance from either the capital city or a major regional centre (Jones, 2000, pp.12-17). In the Northern Territory, “country consists of the whole Territory except for areas within a 75 km radius of Darwin and Alice Springs, the two urban centres with a population of 20,000 persons or more” (Jones, 2000, p17). In contrast to this, for South Australian government schools, eligibility for funding through the Rural Index commences when schools are located more than 80 kms from Adelaide and for non-government schools, a rural locality allocation applies to schools more than 50kms from the Adelaide General Post Office (Jones, 2000, p15).

The geographical approach to delineating and defining ‘rural’ essentially focuses on size, distance and access to services. The sociological or qualitative approach on the other hand pays attention to essences of places and spaces in order to gain an understanding of rural and rurality. Put another way,

the notions of movement, flow from place to place, the ways in which places are connected by histories rather than geographies, and the idea put forward by Deleuze that place is an issue of becoming and identification, all constitute interesting problematics for [an] analysis [and understanding] of rural… (McConaghy, 2002, p.14)

Emphasising place presents options for incorporating what Mulley (1999) calls the vernacular (referred to earlier), for shaping conceptions of rurality. In her paper, she cites Cloke who, in 1977, undertook pioneering work in comparative urban–rural
distinctions. By 1994, Cloke had repudiated his rurality index continuum and moved to an approach that focused on “people’s experience of the rural” (Mulley, 1999, p.3). This dramatic shift, Mulley argues, may be “the key” to understanding rurality, because “while academics struggle to precisely define the rural, most people have a general conception of what constitutes ‘rural’ in their mind’s eye” (p.3). Further, the incorporation of lay or vernacular ideas in a definition of rurality is supported by the theoretical basis of the study of popular culture, and is supported by post-modern theory in its focus on the local and the inclusion of a multiplicity of voices (Mulley, 1999, p.3).

Stereotypes and myths about the Australian bush and bush characters, as an instance of the vernacular, have a long history and continue to have some hold on understandings about rurality. For example, The Advertiser newspaper (Devlin, 2006), in a feature article to commemorate the Black Tuesday bushfires on Eyre Peninsula in 2005, used the banner headline “Bush spirit shines amid tears, pain”. Kapferer (1990) cited in Hooper (2001, p.2) lists “egalitarianism, independence, physical endurance, doggedness, taciturnity, loyalty, resistance to oppression, fortitude and perhaps a naïve faith in humanity” amongst the commonly held stereotypical images of rural people. Cruickshank et al (n.d., p.4) suggest that ideas and assumptions like these “have social consequences”. As well, “ideas about rurality are just that and not objective truths (which) … opens up the possibility of doing things differently”. Further, Cruickshank et al (n.d., p.4) argue that “‘rurality’ is …not something given, but a social construction: its existence and the meaning that is put to it is dependent on its producers”.

Rural Schooling

As reported in Chapter 1, it is generally acknowledged that the role of school principal is a central one in education. It is also generally acknowledged that education in rural and remote Australia, virtually since the introduction of free, compulsory and secular education, has faced a number of critical issues that have continued through to present times, though their manifestations have changed somewhat. These include: training and supplying teachers and leaders in sufficient numbers and quality; funding and building school facilities; developing instructional materials; and setting and assuring standards. Green and Reid (2004, p.255) assert, “[t]he challenge of properly staffing rural schools and of ensuring an equitable provision of quality teaching in the country remains as pressing as it has ever been”. Kyle (1990) also captures well some of the enduring and
fundamental contextual features of rural schooling in Australia, where policy
development to reflect the actual realities of rural contexts has been overshadowed by
persistent mythologising about ‘the bush’.

In addition to teacher supply and quality issues, including those which emerge during pre-
serve teacher education (Sharplin, 2002), there has been the enduring issue of attracting and
retaining principals for rural and remote schools which has, in essence, paralleled the
difficulties of attracting and retaining qualified teachers. Under the heading of “Special
Problems of Rural Areas”, the report, *Education in South Australia 1969-1970* (Government
of South Australia, 1971), referred to in Chapter 1 and often referred to as the Karmel
Committee Report, focuses on issues and shortcomings of staffing for rural schools of the
day including:

Many teachers in charge of small rural schools [known as head teachers] are
in their first and second year of teaching, and have had little or no
experience in larger schools where more professional help is available. They
are, in addition, often poorly qualified (p.205).

The report also states:

We think there are objections to sending inexperienced teachers to remote
schools where no person experienced in the field is available for
consultation (p.206)...[b]ut [t]he provision of teachers with an adequate
range of qualifications for teaching these [remote] secondary pupils is
difficult, particularly in special rural schools where the numbers may be
very small (p.207- 208).

The Karmel Committee Report (Government of South Australia, 1971), though written nearly
40 years ago, provides some very pertinent historical contextual understandings about rural
education and particularly rural school staffing practices in South Australia, of which
principal are one critical component. To address the inexperience and lack of qualifications
of many of those being sent to small rural and remote schools, the Karmel Committee
recommended that “a single headmaster should be responsible for groups of small schools
[and]...[v]isiting consultants should be prepared to spend several days with new teachers, and
resource kits should be made available” (p.209). This was followed some years later by a
report to the then Commonwealth Schools Commission (1988) which showed that many of
the issues unearthed and reported upon by Karmel were still very much ‘alive’. The report,
known as *Schooling in Rural Australia*, did not make specific mention of rural school
leadership issues or the role of principals in rural schools other than through a few references
to groups of small schools working together. However, given the scope of the report, and the very substantial evidence considered for its production, it can be reasonably presumed that the term teacher is used to include those, like principals, who occupy leadership positions.

In addition to government reports and enquiries, there is other literature that illustrates and illuminates the enduring problematic and complex nature of leading and teaching in schools in rural and remote locations (Yarrow *et al.*, 1999; McConaghy 2002 & 2005; Boylan 2003; Green & Reid, 2004). As well, Gibson (1993) has analysed the policies and practices used by education systems in Australia to select and appoint teachers to rural and remote schools. These were contrasted with a sample of teachers’ perceptions of what extra pre-service preparation for country teaching was needed. Gibson essentially argued for additional preparation for rural and remote teaching in two areas. The first is a combination of pedagogical and school management knowledge and skills to enable teachers to competently teach multi-grade classes and run a school, or a section of it, as required by the system. The second area is in community:

the awareness of anticipated community expectations, the development of an ability to deal with values clashes, greater emphasis upon self knowledge and assessment and a recognition of the role of personal values and their effect on the teaching learning process (Gibson, 1993, p.11).

As well, Gibson’s work underlines the need for better understanding of isolation and prior experience in rural communities as required elements of an enhanced preparation for rural and remote leadership and teaching.

In relation to the importance of schools in rural and remote communities, McSwan and Stevens (in Yarrow *et al.*, 1998, p.5) emphasise that “schools are central to the regenerative process in rural towns and as such play a key role in their long-term sustainability”. Associated with this is building social capital, which occurs when individuals and groups work together to achieve a common goal (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). There is also the matter of the dispositional framing that leaders bring to their positions. Kilpatrick and Johns (n.d.), in research on leadership for rural school–community partnerships, raise serious questions about the limitations of traditional leadership theory for progressing community relationships. This has led them to focus on what they call “the leadership process...[to] capture the interactions between ‘leaders’ and the various contexts that arise as the process progresses” (p 5). From this, Kilpatrick and
Johns (p.6) identify five stages of the leadership process: the trigger stage, followed by initiation, development, maintenance and sustainability.

In addition to literature on rural leadership and communities, both in terms of education and more generally, there is considerable literature on leadership of small rural schools which typically focuses upon apparently excessive expectations placed upon teaching principals, particularly in relation to their often very limited professional experience. For example, Lester (2003, p.1) has studied the “dilemmas and tensions faced by twelve Queensland government primary school principals in remote rural communities who have at their school the intellectual asset of one”. Lester concludes from the research that the principals face four key tensions and two dilemmas. The tensions are:

- leadership versus management,
- leadership versus management versus instruction,
- management versus leadership versus instruction versus being the ‘one’,
- educational knowledge of the principal versus the educational knowledge of the community (Lester, 2003, pp.6–10).

The two dilemmas are “staff development or staff dismissal” and “principal’s vision versus school community’s vision” (pp.11–12).

Mulcahy’s (1999) review of Chalker’s (1999) *Leadership for Rural Schools: Lessons for all Educators* adds a pertinent historical perspective to dilemmas and tensions and small rural schools. He observes that small rural schools commenced as “bastions of democracy and civic purpose” (p.1) but by as early as the end of the nineteenth century, they were being “depicted as a problem—an impediment to educational progress and development” (p.1). Today, maintaining viability is a priority for rural school principals even though, according to Mulcahy (1999, p.1), “researchers and leaders [have] discovered some unhappy truths: Bigger is not necessarily better, there is value in diversity, and many of the qualities characterizing rural community schools are worthy of emulation in *all* schools”. Cushman (1997, p 1) also advocates that there are characteristics about small schools such as “knowing students well… and joining with others in collaborative communities” that offer potential solutions for some of the problems being faced by large urban-based schools.
Gender and rural schooling

With a few notable exceptions, there has been little research about gender as a factor in the construction of the principal in rural contexts. After an extensive consideration of women in educational management, Crawford, Kydd and Riches (1997, p.85) conclude that “there is relatively little to date in research about women managers in education that can be used to challenge theories of educational management or lead to their reconceptualisation to include both men and women”. One such exception, however, is Blackmore (1998, p.461) who has written extensively about gender and leadership “draw[ing] from a number of research studies which have focussed upon gender reform, leadership and educational change over a period of radical restructuring of education in Victoria, Australia, since 1989”.

In this work, Blackmore suggests thirteen findings that highlight the significance of incorporating gender in any research on rural principals. Eight of these findings are relevant to how rural principals construct their roles. Each encapsulates either a contextual factor associated with constructing the role of a rural principal or a finding that explicitly illuminates the diversity of impacts and consequences for women in rural education leadership positions. Paraphrasing Blackmore (1998, pp.467–474), they are: restructuring and its consequences for the division of labour; image and markets; women as new sources of leadership talent; women as small school principals and workload implications; professional educators versus managerial tensions; signals sent to communities by appointing all female staffs — gender ‘gone too far’; entrapment by a culture of care; and the price women pay in trying to balance care and emotions with toughness. A journal of a female teaching principal of a small rural school involved in the research done by Blackmore (1998, p.474) provides a summary of what seems to be an overriding consequence for women aspiring to be leaders: “I have invariably felt that the encouragement of women to aspire to leadership positions causes a dilemma”.

Hall (1997) has conducted an extensive review of research of women in educational management in Britain, using the United States as a benchmark against which to evaluate the ‘state of play’. While neither of these countries has exactly the same circumstances as Australia vis-à-vis women and educational leadership and management, there are similarities of culture and context from the results of the review. The review adds impetus to a consideration of gendered issues and principalship in rural
contexts in South Australia for several reasons. Hall (1997, p.73) found that most of the educational management research that she reviewed was overwhelmingly about the male experience of management and “the experiences of men and women educators are assumed to be the same”. She argues (p.74) that gender “is an aside rather than a significant contribution to a conceptualisation of school leadership”. As well, Hall makes a very strong point about the limitations of comparative studies of management styles which “can encourage androcentric views by continuing to use a male concept definition of leadership” (Hall, 1997, p.82). In addition, Hall’s work is relevant to investigating how principals in rural contexts construct their roles because it includes a focus on “how women perform, not how they are different from men — [it] assume[s] … the differences between women to be as important as the differences between men and women” (p.82).

Dunshea (1998) has investigated female beginning principals in rural and regional areas. She argues (p.203) that much of the research in educational administration “is flawed due to the assumption that male experience is the norm from which generalisations are made appropriately for all beginning principals”. Dunshea also argues (p.205) that “ignoring gender based differences…reaffirm[s] the androcentric bias and sexist bias of the literature of educational administration”. Dunshea uses Giddens’ (1984) stucturation theory as the basis for her research because “[p]eople are not passive, they are actively engaged with society and their actions affect their social environment” (p.207). As well, Dunshea, citing Creswell (1994), emphasises the importance of context in relation to the research being undertaken. This is particularly relevant to the present research because substantial ‘weight’ is given to the nature and qualities of the rural contexts in which the various participants go about constructing their leadership roles.

Collard (2001) takes a very different position in relation to the primacy of gender and leadership to that put forward by Dunshea. Essentially Collard (p.343) asserts that there is “growing scepticism with the validity of gender typecasts”, arguing from Schon (1988, p.343) that typecasts “fail to recognise that individuals who become teachers and principals draw their beliefs from a range of training and reflection which may lead them to question broad social norms”. Based upon research undertaken with a sample of approximately 17% of Victoria’s principals in 1996–7 and a 73.4% survey response
rate, Collard confirmed (p352) “the importance of gender differences in principalship”, but also cautioned “against regarding them as solitary and unilateral influences”.

**Leadership**

Harris (2005, p.73) undertook an extensive review of educational leadership in order to “provide a commentary on the dominant theoretical positions that characterise the contemporary leadership field and to explore the empirical foundation of these different theoretical positions”. Like Spillane, Hallett and Diamond (2003), Harris includes some commentary on distributed leadership, raises and discusses a number of the contentious and contested aspects of educational leadership and, importantly for investigating the construction of the principal’s role, is critical of the weight given to the *what* dimensions of leadership rather than the *how* dimensions. Harris acknowledges that “the school leadership field is difficult terrain to traverse” (p.76). Harris also reviews leadership in terms of phases and from this provides an analysis of different leadership theories. Her commentary identifies several gaps and under-explored areas including “the contextual differences between schools…” (p.84). As stated earlier, the contextual dimensions of rural schools and rural communities are integral to investigating how principals construct their roles.

Case study research by Crowther, Hann and McMaster (2006, p.1) into school innovation and leadership, used as a starting point, “it would appear that the nature of educational leadership that underpins successful school innovation remains both problematic and vague”. MacGilchrist, Myers and Reid (2004) on the other hand take what appears to be a more optimistic stance on school improvement and its connection to leadership and have produced nine intelligences as “a framework for school improvement” (p.108). From this they have identified that it is authentic leadership which is “centrally concerned with ethics and morality and with deciding what is significant, what is right and what is ‘worthwhile’” (p.149), that is, essential to organisational wellbeing and performance. Similarly, Senge (1992, p.357) concludes his writing on the learning organisation with the observation that the distinguishing characteristics of outstanding leaders are “clarity and persuasiveness of their ideas, the depth of their commitment, and their openness to continually learning more”. Senge (1992, p.359) also asserts that the five learning organisation disciplines he developed — systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision and team
learning — “might just as well be called the leadership disciplines as the learning disciplines”.

How others, or those sometimes called ‘followers’, contribute towards the construction of a leader in an educational context is investigated and discussed by Spillane, Hallett & Diamond (2003). They identify four kinds of capital which appear to play an important role in this — human, cultural, social and economic, each of which, while treated as distinct entities, in practice “were rarely mentioned...in isolation” (Spillane et al, 2003, p.3). Their research is relevant to how principals of rural schools construct their role because a primary focus is on construction as a phenomenon, and the contributions that others, like teachers and parents, may make are part of the totality of what occurs with constructing a role like principalship. In other words, Spillane et al bring to the consideration of how principals construct their roles, the contribution that significant others can make. The essence of their research is in the finding that “to become a leader, one must undergo a process of valuation: On the basis of the possession of human, cultural, social and economic capital, potential leaders must be constructed as ‘valid’ by followers, who then attribute leadership to them” (Spillane et al, 2003, p.4, emphasis in original).

Thirdspace, Spatiality and Three Worlds
I have chosen the theoretical work of Soja (1989 & 1996) on Thirdspace as the mainstay of my interrogation of data, because from all of the reading I have done for my research, it offers the most potential for fresh understandings to be formed about how principals say they construct their roles. Soja argues that thinking differently about space and spatiality may result in insights about phenomena, from the very personal to the global that might otherwise remain masked, blurred, hidden, suppressed or oppressed. The ‘thinking differently’ referred to here Soja (1996, p.2) calls Thirdspace, “a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, appearances, and meanings”. The central challenge of Thirdspace is to “begin to think about the spatiality of human life in much the same way that we have persistently approached life’s intrinsic and richly revealing historical and social qualities: its historicality and sociality” (p.2, emphasis in original). This is because, from Soja’s perspective, while it can be assumed that ‘rightfully’ there will always be historical and social dimensions brought to bear on
issues or problems, there is more. Integral to Thirdspace then is an invitation, an imploring perhaps, to “set aside the demands to make an either/or choice and contemplate instead the possibility of a both/and also logic…” (p.5).

Understanding spatiality is crucial to understanding Thirdspace and its potential power as a theoretical tool. Soja (1996, p.80) ‘arrives’ at his definition of spatiality as “socially-produced space” through the necessity of having to deal with the ways that physical conceptions of space dominate perceptions and thinking:

The dominance of a physicalist view of space has so permeated the analysis of human spatiality that it tends to distort our vocabulary. Thus, while such adjectives as ‘social’, ‘political’, ‘economic’, and even ‘historical’ generally suggest, unless otherwise specified, a link to human action and motivation, the term ‘spatial’ typically evokes a physical or geometrical image, something external to the social context and to social action, a part of the ‘environment’, a part of the setting for society — its naively given container — rather than a formative structure created by society. We do not have a widely used and accepted expression in English to convey the inherently social quality of organized space, especially since the terms ‘social space’ and ‘human geography’ have become so murky with multiple and often incompatible meanings. For these and other reasons, I have chosen to use the term ‘spatiality’ to specify this socially-produced space (Soja, 1989, p.80).

To develop Thirdspace, Soja draws upon the work of a number of people including Lefebvre, Foucault and bell hooks (her preferred style of naming). From Lefebvre’s stipulations about different kinds of space and the relations and recombinations of them, Soja (1996) moves, perhaps more accurately journeys, to his concept of Thirdspace, through what he describes as Firstspace and Secondspace. Firstspace is “fixed mainly on the materiality of spatial forms, on things that can be empirically mapped” (p.10). Secondspace essentially comprises “thoughtful representations of human spatiality in mental and cognitive forms” (p.10). First and Second space are basically coincidental with “Lefebvre’s perceived and conceived spaces, with the first often thought of as ‘real’ and the second as ‘imagined’ ideas of real and imagined” (p.10).

According to Soja (1996), Lefebvre maintained a long fascination with the tensions and possibilities between centrality and peripheralness, which in turn served to prompt Lefebvre to frequently declare that “two terms are never enough…. [t]here is always the Other, a third term that disrupts, disorders, and begins to reconstitute the conventional
binary opposition into an–Other that comprehends but is more than just the sum of two parts” (p.31). Lefebvre’s insistence led Soja to advocate “thirling-as-Othering” which is like an in-built process of an idea or construct for critiquing its own ‘otherness’. In other words, thirling-as-Othering “does not derive simply from an additative combination of its binary antecedents but rather from a disordering, deconstruction and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalization producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different” (p.61).

With thirling-as-Othering comes what Lefebvre calls the trialetics of spatiality, an insistence:

that each mode of thinking about space, each ‘field’ of human spatiality — the physical, the mental, the social — be seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical. No one mode of spatial thinking is inherently privileged or intrinsically ‘better’ than the others as long as each remains open to the re-combinations and simultaneities of the ‘real-and-imagined’ (Soja, 1996, p.65).

Soja (1996) uses the lived experiences and theorising of bell hooks, a black American feminist, to exemplify and to illuminate Thirdspace in practice. In her work, hooks among other things, choses margins, marginalisation and marginality as opportunities and spaces for “radical openness” (p.12). For hooks, intentionally moving out of the centre to the peripheral zones is a “critical turning point in the construction of other forms of counter-hegemonic and subaltern identity and more embracing communities of resistance” (Soja, 1996, p.97). The nature and the power of the place of marginality is, in essence, transformed through the act of choosing rather than having it imposed according to hooks (Soja, 1996, pp.98 & 99). Moving toward peripheral places as locations of radical re-conceptualisation, hooks asserts, can create new spaces for thinking, different ways of seeing and interpreting, different ways of understanding and moving towards actions. This is essentially because the move to a location that is often interpreted as being less powerful rather than being positioned centrally, breaks conventions and, more significantly in terms of the development of Thirdspace, creates a ‘fertile context’ for ‘Othering’. Put another way, the “evocative process of choosing marginality reconceptualizes the problematic of subjection by deconstructing and disordering both margin and center…and new spaces of opportunity and action are created, the new spaces that difference makes” (Soja, 1996, p.98).
Probably Foucault’s main contribution to Soja’s Thirdspace work is from a question that Foucault asked: “why is it that time has tended to be treated as ‘richness, fecundity, life, dialectic’ while in contrast space has been typically seen as the ‘dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile’?” (Soja, 1996, p.15). Foucault answers the question by pointing to the long history of privileging the historical imagination over others, which has in practice nearly drowned all other kinds of voices, especially those that try to speak out of and for space and spatiality. In reflecting on the answer and other related writings of Foucault, Soja enjoins those who would be disposed to allow space for spatiality to flourish for analysis and synthesis, to remember that, for Foucault, the relationship between power and knowledge was always “embedded in a trialectic of power, knowledge, and space” (Soja, 1996, p.148, emphasis in original).

The richness and multi-dimensionality of Thirdspace and thirding-as-Othering as a theoretical framework for gaining new insights and understandings about how principals of rural schools construct their roles, is, in part, the result of Soja using contributions from Foucault, Lefebvre, bell hooks and others. For my research, I argue that Soja’s Thirdspace as a theoretical framework might also be enriched and extended through a consideration of Popper’s (1992 a & b) three kinds of Worlds, which were developed in order to gain a clearer understanding of the interaction between physical states and mental states.

In Popper’s schema, World 1 refers to existing entities or ‘real’ things. 'Real' needs to be interpreted rather more broadly than just physical or tangible entities. Social structures are real, structures such as the organisational arrangements of a school. Traffic codes and rules are another example, and so too are the culturally based behaviour conventions such as modes of communicating in a mass public setting compared to those which might be used in a small group.

World 2 is the world of the individual and most specifically the mind and mental states, including states of consciousness and psychological dispositions and unconscious states. World 2 has the primary means required to shape and interpret World 1 — the human mind.
World 3 is the world of knowledge, “the objective products of the human mind” (Popper, 1992, p.8). World 3 is, in essence, a storehouse of mind-made products, using the term ‘products’ in a comprehensive way, so that it includes things such as generated facts that represent real things or events, conventions and protocols, stories, ideas and strategies for solving problems. World 3 is the 'location' of knowledge, although its making is the consequence of the interaction between the Worlds.

The three Worlds 'exist' essentially because of their utility for considering, interpreting and deriving understandings from observations and experiences. In a sense, the concept of worlds is an instance of reification in that the 'worlds' are not 'real' things, rather it is what is meant and represented when terms such as World 1, World 2 and World 3 are used that is 'real' and substantive. As Popper states (1992, p.8), the “word ‘world’ is obviously not being used here to mean the universe or cosmos, but rather parts of it”.

Conceptually, the Worlds are linked through World 2, the world of the mind. The mind is the centre of action from the perspective of human intervention and the shaping of 'what is', 'what might be', ‘what has been’. While things can change in World 1 without the intervention of the human mind, such as occurs through nature, the mind, World 2, is also a powerful determining and shaping influence on World 1. Facts and opinions — knowledge — about World 1 are made by World 2 and 'stored' in World 3. And, knowledge from World 3 can be carried back to the minds of individuals, World 2, who can take actions as human agents to change World 1.

In Popper’s three Worlds, there is a complex interactive process that occurs between and with each of the worlds to produce knowledge. This process is known as hermeneutics which “involves the study of meaning and comprises theory and practice of interpretation and understanding of the different social contexts in which human beings learn about the world in which they live and work” (Keeves, n.d., p.3). Central to hermeneutics is language as an explanatory tool, as a primary generator and conveyor of meaning. From its Greek origins, hermeneutics deals with explanation as a pedagogical technique. Giddens (1993) argues that a double hermeneutic is involved in the process of creating understandings and making knowledge, as knowledge from World 3 is brought back through the minds of individuals (World 2) to make changes and to
transform individuals’ perceptions of World 1, as well as the nature of World 1 itself (1993).

There are two ‘intersections’ between Thirdspace and Popper’s Three Worlds and knowledge making that contribute towards a theoretical basis for new insights and understanding about how principals of rural schools construct their roles.

The first ‘intersection’ is of a structural or design kind. Soja essentially builds Thirdspace using the elements of Firstspace and Secondspace. Firstspace comprises the material aspects of space and Secondspace the conceptualisation of space — the mental mapping. In Popper’s schema, World 1 comprises the “physical world,…divide(d) into animate and inanimate bodies, and which also contains in particular states and events such as stresses, movements, forces and fields of force” (Popper, 1992, p.8). World 2 is the world of the mind, conscious and unconscious experiences. The hermeneutic interactions between these two Worlds produce World 3, “the objective products of the human mind” (Popper, 1992a, p.8). There is a sense then of correspondence or parallelism between Firstspace and World 1 — materiality and real objects; between Secondspace and World 2 — ideas about space and the activity of the human mind; and between Thirdspace and World 3 — space for exploring spatiality and Othering and the outcomes of the workings of the human mind. Put another way, each of the theoretical frameworks as represented in its most elemental form is derived from specified inputs, prescribed throughputs or interactive processes, and particularised products or outcomes.

The second ‘intersection’ is the potentially generative nature of each of the theoretical frameworks. Both Thirdspace and Three Worlds, it can be argued, focus on creating space for difference to be explored, considered and re-formed. Thirdspace does this by challenging individuals to release themselves from the traditional ways in which space is usually conceived, i.e. physical and often linked to a linear understanding of time, and to see space and spatiality as resources for exploring and growing new imaginations, new understandings, new knowledge. Three Worlds, on the other hand, is generative because of its focus on the primacy of mental products or what Popper (1992a, p.9) says “anthropologists call ‘culture’”. Elaborating further, Popper builds upon “culture” to declare the primacy of language in “the creation of mankind” (1992a, p.20) and with it,
the attainment of a “decisive” achievement, the ability to “consciously judge one theory as inferior to another” and from here, produce knowledge (1992a, p.21).

In Chapter 6 I present a summary of Thirdspace and Three Worlds as a lead into my theorising about how principals of rural schools construct their roles when considered using some of the foundational features of them.

The next chapter comprises the rationale for the research method I used and the approach taken to forming a sample for my data collection.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

Purpose
This chapter presents the methodological basis of my research and the rationale for the selection of the research sample and participants.

Research methods
Decisions about which research method or methods to use are centred on a key question — how should knowledge about the world be obtained? More specifically, how should knowledge be obtained for the particular purpose one has in mind for the knowledge that is being sought? Broadly classified, there are two major methodological approaches to research in the social sciences — qualitative and quantitative.

Qualitative approaches to research primarily focus on building understanding. Qualitative research “seeks meaning (rather than generality as with its quantitative counterpart) and contributes to theory development by proceeding inductively” (Miller & Brewer, 2003, p.193). As Huberman and Miles (2002, p.305) argue, much of the “wider use of qualitative methods … [has been] underpinned by the persistent requirement in social policy fields to understand complex behaviours, needs, systems and cultures”. Qualitative approaches to research embrace a wide range of data collection techniques, of which interviews of various kinds — structured, semi-structured, unstructured, long, short, focussed — have “become one of the most common and powerful ways to understand our fellow humans” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, pp.697–698).

Quantitative approaches to research, on the other hand, are essentially based upon measurements obtained from samples — frequently large and randomised — and use mathematical and statistical tools to interrogate the data and generate results. Quantitative methods are often used when being able to generalise is the principal purpose of research — even though this can also be done using certain qualitative techniques — or as Miller and Brewer (2003, p.193) observe, “to find as small a set of variables as possible which explain as much as possible”.
Why qualitative?
Qualitative methods have been used because the main objective of my research is to gain understanding about how principals of rural schools construct their roles. Specifically, I gathered the primary data for my research by means of extended semi-structured interviews. Principals of schools are busy people and therefore this also had to be taken into account when deciding upon the most appropriate and legitimate way to collect the data being sought from them. Informal discussions with a number of principals prior to commencing data collection clearly indicated that they would most likely be willing to participate in it if they had some framework to help focus their thinking and responses to my questions. In addition, it became clear to me during the pre-design phase of my research, that principals also wanted scope to contribute ‘other thoughts’ they may have towards the kind of research in which I was planning to involve a group of them.

The inputs I have described in the preceding paragraph, linked to the fundamental purpose of my research, combined to determine that a semi-structured interview process was the most appropriate way to collect the data I needed. As well, using a semi-structured interview approach to data collection assisted me as the investigator with establishing my relationship with each of the participants. A significant part of doing this occurred in the period prior to the commencement of in-situ interviews when I was negotiating with principals about their involvement. Each wanted to be well informed about the purpose of my research and the types of questions they might be asked if they were selected and they signed on for involvement.

Interview structure
In Chapter 1, under the heading of framing the research focus, I set out the areas of investigation for addressing my main research question. Figure 2 represents in matrix form all of the dimensions of the semi-structured interview that I conducted with each of the participants.
Sample size and composition

Literature on qualitative research methods (McCracken, 1988; Patton, 1990 & 2002; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Stake, 1995; Huberman & Miles, 2002) frequently raises and discusses the matter of what sample size or what number of cases should be used in a qualitative approach to research. As Patton (2002, p.230) states, “perhaps nothing better captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches”. As well, Patton (2002, p.230) asserts that “[q]ualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, even single cases (N=1), selected purposefully”. In addition Patton (2002, p.245) argues that “sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the enquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources”.

In order to purposefully determine the size and characteristics of my sample, four matters had to be resolved. Firstly, what sector or sectors of schooling (government,
non-government, Catholic) should be included in the research; secondly, how should rural be defined; thirdly, what types of schools should be included in the sample; and, fourthly, what should be the experience and gender profile of the principals selected for interviewing?

In relation to the first matter, I decided to confine my research to government schools in South Australia. There are two main reasons for doing this. Firstly, the government sector comprises an extensive diversity of school types and contexts. Secondly, the non-government sector is not obligated by legislation, as is the government sector, to ensure that all children of compulsory age have access to schooling. A consequence of this, with the exception of some small Catholic Parish schools, is that there are comparatively few non-government schools outside the metropolitan area, and those that are, are mainly located in larger regional centres rather than what is usually called, a country town.

To resolve the second matter, I undertook a review of literature on defining and describing rural locations and contexts. This was presented in Chapter 2. While recognising that there is considerable divergence in how rural locations and places are defined, it was essential, in order to proceed with the research, to develop a basis for deciding schools that were eligible for sample selection and those that were not, based upon some ‘agreed locational’ characteristics.

From the review, I decided the eligibility of the rural schools for my research would be on the basis of four criteria and two exclusions. The criteria are:

- that the school is more than 80 kilometres from Adelaide — the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services uses this distance as the basis for its Rural Student Index in allocating global budgets to schools;
- that the school is not in a peri-rural location — “rural places with urban consciousness” (Iaquinta & Drescher, 2002, p.6)
- that the school is not in a regional centre, i.e. Mt Gambier, Whyalla, Port Lincoln, Port Augusta, Port Pirie, Murray Bridge, or the Riverland Corridor bounded by Loxton, Berri, Waikerie and Renmark;
that the school is not on the Fleurieu Peninsula which is a particular instance of a peri-urban context but is often described as being rural.

The two exclusions are:

- Schools on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands in the far north west of South Australia, because they are especially unique in terms of their location, the communities associated with them, and the selection of staff and governance arrangements and, as such, warrant dedicated research of the kind I have done.
- Designated special schools, junior primary schools and specialist providers of education like School of the Air were excluded from consideration for the research sample. The schools are similar to the Anangu schools in that they are quite unique in terms of their focus and operation and that they are mainly located in places excluded by the criteria above.

The combined criteria and exclusions prescribed, for my research sampling, places and towns where the population size and density is low, there is frequently a significant distance to a recognised regional centre, and the scale of the school is such that it is usually the largest organisation in the local area. In other words, the criteria and exclusions produced locations that are not designated a city or regional centre, nor do they have features usually found in large population centres such as automated traffic controls, shopping malls, defined business and industrial areas, multiple providers of education, a performing arts venue(s) and a hospital with a range of specialist services.

In relation to the third and fourth matters for determining eligibility for my sample, I used data that was publicly available on the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services website to identify schools that met the locational ‘test’ as set out above in the criteria and the exclusions. I ‘blended’ this with information about principals, also shown on the website and with my knowledge of rural school leaders in South Australia, given my relatively recent state-wide responsibility for government country schools and children’s services. These processes created for my research a sample size of five principals and their schools with the following characteristics:
• a Year R–12 school, enrolment <100, female principal, not located in a rural
town or regional centre
• a Year R–12 school, enrolment >100, female principal, rural town location
• a Year R–7 school, enrolment >100, male principal, rural town location
• a Year R–12 school, enrolment >100, male principal, rural town location and
formal education and training links with local industry
• a Year 8–12 school, enrolment >100, male principal, rural town location.

Sample characteristics
As stated by Patton (2002, p.230), the sampling resulted in “information–rich cases
whose study [would subsequently] illuminate the questions under study”. The enrolment
figures used in the selection criteria are significant to the extent that schools of less than
100 in the South Australian context are usually referred to as small schools though there
is ‘no hard and fast’ rule about this. Of more importance for the purposes of my
research, small rural schools, especially ones with both primary and secondary
enrolments, are often sites where there is a sense of struggle to maintain viability in
terms of central agency enrolment targets and the resources which flow from these.
Reception to Year 12 (R–12) schools are schools that enrol students from 5 years of age
through to Year 12 level, and may in some cases in rural areas, enrol students who want
to return to complete their secondary education after being in the workforce or having
left earlier for other reasons. R–12 schools in rural areas as a type of school, are usually
referred to as Area Schools. R–7 schools as a group are known in South Australia as
primary schools and 8–12 schools are called secondary or high schools. The richness of
the sample chosen for my research is illustrated in the following overviews of each case,
presented in the order of the above list.

Milton is an Area School which opened in the mid-1960s with a primary enrolment of
134 and a secondary enrolment of 30 students. It was formed by the closure of six small
one- and two-teacher rural schools and built in the geographic centre of the six schools.
The school has a current enrolment of 73 students from Reception to Year 12.
Approximately 15 students have departmentally recognised specific learning or care
needs, which entitles the school to additional resources. In 2003 there were 93 students
attending the school. The recent enrolment decline has been due mainly to farm
amalgamations and the impacts of drought. All of the students attending Milton travel to school by bus. The nearest township to the school is about 20 kilometres away and the school is “about 70 or 80 kms away from a reasonable size town” (Milton Principal). The school up until recently had a fully operational Child Parent Centre but, due to a reduction in numbers, it was forced to close and was replaced with a Play Centre for babies and parents (mostly mothers). The school is the hub of the surrounding farming community and is the location of sporting facilities, a library and general meeting places. The school has a policy of offering as many subjects as possible in a face-to-face way but also uses distance delivery methods. The principal was in her first year of appointment as a principal of a school at the time of collecting data.

Kent is an Area School with an enrolment of 153 students evenly divided between the primary (R–7) and secondary (8–12) year levels. It is over 50 years old and was formed, like every other Area School in the state, through closures and amalgamations of one- and two-teacher rural schools under a general policy of consolidation of education provision in rural areas. Kent is located in a township with a district population of around 1,500. Eighty percent of students attending Kent travel to school by bus. The enrolment of the school peaked at nearly 400 twenty years ago. One immediately obvious consequence of this is a very favourable student-to-space ratio. The school is the largest organisation in the town and district. Broad acre grain and sheep farming is the dominant agricultural focus of the district. The town is the administrative centre of local government and also provides retail and commercial services. The principal of Kent had been a principal of a rural primary school prior to being appointed to Kent.

Wickes is a primary school in a country town. It has been open for more than 100 years. Its current enrolment is 160 students organised into 7 classes. Approximately 65% of the students are eligible for special financial assistance, which is indicative of their socio-economic background. A small but significant number of Indigenous children attend the school. At any time, between 12 and 15 students are working on negotiated curriculum plans to address learning needs and to assist them to achieve national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy. Wickes has 23 staff, which includes a librarian, school counsellor and 9 support staff. At the beginning of the year in which I interviewed the principal, the school was devastated by a major fire and at the time of the interview, a large re-building program was happening. The principal of Wickes had
previously been a principal of a rural primary school that had to close due to low enrolments.

Grantham is a Year 8–12 secondary school about 2 ½ hours drive from Adelaide and it has been open for almost a century. It has an enrolment of a little over 200 students. There has been growth in enrolments over the past four years of about 40, which has come from some changes to the way primary schools in the district ‘feed’ their students into Year 8, and changes to the reputation of Grantham. Published information on Grantham states that it serves eight rural communities which “are characterised by agriculture, transport, religion, environment, tourism and other cultural activities that reflect important themes of the district” (School Information Brochure). Grantham, as far as possible, functions as a stand-alone school but is also an original member of the state’s most enduring and successful rural schools cluster. Grantham “is active in developing partnerships with local government and local businesses to enhance the range of community facilities. Through these partnerships…curriculum delivery is also enriched” (School Information Brochure). The principal has held other country leadership positions but Grantham is his first as a principal.

Coles is an Area School of 180 students and 18 teaching staff situated about 6 ½ hours by road from Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. It is part of a rural town that serves as the business centre for broad acre dry land farming and more recently, a burgeoning aquaculture industry. Approximately 20% of the students travel into the school each day on one of its three buses. There is a small boarding house at the school, which caters for students who come from out of the school’s district to study the specialist aquaculture program that is available in Years 10–12. Coles is a member of a cluster of schools that, between them, focus on providing education for a diversity of employment pathways. The school has a community library, in common with over 50 other rural schools located in small rural towns or districts. The current principal has extensive experience as a country principal, having served in this position at several other rural schools.

In summary, I arrived at the size and composition of my research sample by making a judgement about the number and kinds of cases that would need to be considered in-depth, to optimise the likelihood of enhancing present knowledge and understanding
about how principals construct their roles in rural contexts. The sample I used is an illuminative one; it is not a representative one in the quantitative tradition of research. While sampling “to the point of redundancy is an ideal” (Patton 2002, p.246), the aim of my research is to investigate, document, analyse and synthesise what principals of a diverse and contextually rich set of rural schools say about how they construct their roles, with a view to producing new understandings through theorising derived from Soja’s (1989 & 1996) Thirdaype and Popper’s (1992a & b) Three Worlds. It is not to investigate, document, analyse and synthesise everything that could be said about how principals construct their roles.

Some ‘cautions’ about interviewing

As McCracken (1988, p.22) states, “[e]very qualitative interview is, potentially, a Pandora’s box”, both from the perspective of the respondent and the interviewer. In order to reduce both the Pandora’s box aspects of interviewing, and the ‘noise and distractions’ from the contextual and relational aspects of interviewing, there are several ‘cautions’ arising from the literature and from my previous experiences of interviewing, that I factored into the design of my semi-structured interview instrument and the interviews that I conducted. Firstly, I attempted to create some ‘distance’ (McCracken, 1988) from the respondents, given my previous role as a senior executive in the South Australian government school system, as declared in Chapter 1. McCracken (1988, p.22) when writing about distance and interviewing asserts that working in familiar territory with people familiar to you or who know of your background, “can create a treacherous sense of familiarity”. Being aware that familiarity can be a problem is part way to dealing with it. Another way is through the use of humour and elements of surprise (McCracken, 1988) although a feature of semi-structured interviewing is that elements of surprise are somewhat reduced vis-á-vis an unstructured approach. There is of course the potential for surprise in the interactions between interviewer and interviewee in terms of neither knowing precisely how the other will behave at any time during their engagement. Another means I employed during the interviews was prompts to try and get beyond what individuals apparently took for granted, prompts (McCracken, 1988, p.22) such as: ‘Yes, but why do think the department thinks that way about rural schools?’, and ‘What do you mean when you say…about this rural community?’.
Secondly, “interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p.696). The main consequence flowing from this for the interviews I conducted for my research was that I acknowledged ‘up-front’ before commencing each interview, the essence of the statement. This appeared to have the effect of making the interviewee more prepared to accept the legitimacy of interviewing for research purposes. Agreeing to provide interviewees with a verbatim transcript for editing before any analysis work commenced, also helped reinforce the veracity of the assertion by Fontana and Frey.

Thirdly, and related to the issue in the previous paragraph, the ‘results’ of an interview are a product of the interactions and the contexts as well as the responses to the questions asked (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p.699). This is why, in my recording of the interviews, I have placed considerable weight on the contextual dimensions of each, on the relationships between the interviewee and their contexts and, most importantly, on implications for how individuals construct their roles.

Finally, while there is evidence to show that interviewer characteristics such as age and gender have relatively little impact on responses there is some impact differential between high and low status interviewers (Fontana & Frey, 2005, pp.702–703). Ascribing status to oneself is supremely subjective but it needs to be acknowledged again here, in light of the concerns articulated by the authors, that each of the respondents I interviewed had known me or known about me as a senior departmental bureaucrat. To ‘offset’ this, I followed very strictly all of the ethical research procedures required by the Flinders University and when interviews on site took place, emphasised my student doctoral researcher status.

**Summary**

In summary, my research into how principals of rural schools construct their roles uses qualitative methods and, specifically, semi-structured interviews for data collection. This is because the research primarily focuses on understanding, rather than generalising. The sample for my research was determined after a detailed investigation of the characteristics of rural locations and contexts, and school and principal profiles. The primary purpose for developing criteria and exclusions for selecting the sample was
to ensure transparency and authenticity of process. Like all qualitative data collection processes, interviews are neither issue-free nor without their critics. In this chapter I have identified those which seem most relevant to my particular research and said how I dealt with them.
Introduction
This chapter comprises what principals say about how they construct their roles, extracted from the verbatim interview transcripts. The data and information are presented using five interview text organisers: framing into the role; vision and learning; leading and organising; community; and learnings for the next leadership position. A summary of each interview precedes each detailed account.

Kent School
Summary Version of Constructing the Role of Principal
Carol came into the school believing she had to prove herself to the secondary staff because she is a primary trained teacher, and because her former leadership position was as principal of a small rural primary school. She walked into a divisive male-dominated school environment where several of the male teachers, and one in particular, held sway over the staff and its professional tone. The town, though tidy and outwardly organised and friendly, has a strong male ethos to it as well, often vocalised and made manifest at the town’s hotel. Gender is an issue both within and outside the school but Carol actively rejects this because she was raised and socialised believing that her female gender is a non issue. Carol, who is early in her tenure, identifies ‘projects’ that she believes will provide her with the means to assert and embed her leadership and management of the school and legitimise her principalship. This goal pervades her thinking and actions. She works to win the hearts and minds of those who have the power to deny legitimation of role, position and authority, viz the males and the secondary staff inside the school and the (mostly) males outside the school who talk and pass judgements on principals, and especially female principals.

Detailed Version of Constructing the Role of Principal
Framing into the role
Carol has been principal of Kent for 3 years. Prior to her appointment she was the principal of a small rural primary school. Before becoming a principal, Carol was a classroom teacher, and then held various school-based positions of additional
responsibility. When considering applying for the position of principal of Kent, Carol was unaware “that the last female principal had been run out of town” partly because of the “real boys club [and consequently] a lot of women on the staff didn’t go into the staffroom at recess and lunch times because of the language and the jokes that the men were telling”. Carol also claimed that she was unaware there was a male-oriented culture in the town and district which subsequently became very pronounced in shaping her thinking about her role as a rural school principal. Carol was told very early after starting at Kent that her “reputation would be destroyed on a bar stool… it wasn’t just [a matter of] the blokes will talk about you, the blokes will destroy you”.

In her second year as principal, Carol spent much of her time engaged in a major conflict which resulted in one of the key protagonists of the ‘blokey culture’ being relocated from the school. The ‘blokey culture’ was also nurtured, according to Carol, by a belief that the “school would not be any good until they got rid of me and got a proper principal who was male”. As Carol views the event on looking back and assessing what happened, she believes “he picked the wrong target”. This is mainly because Carol did not then, and continues not to, perceive gender as an issue in the way she approaches the role of principal. Carol, when questioned about this position said:

I have not constructed my leadership or my role in any way to take into account the gender issues and concerns that people have. I grew up in an all female household and went to an all girls’ school and have never seen that girls/women can’t do what men do and that they should be treated differently.

While gender in terms of constructing her role may not be a factor for Carol, it appears to be a factor in the wider staff context. A female staff representative on the deputy principal selection panel remarked that the appointment of a female to the deputy’s position meant “it’s going to be petticoat rule here”. Carol’s statements on gender could be interpreted as being emphatic and closing out the possibility of other ways of understanding the role of gender in the way she constructs her role. However, gender is problematic at least in terms of context both at Kent and within the community that sends its children to the Kent school. The issue of gender is considered in Chapter 5 and again in Chapter 6.
Chapter 4: The Interviews

Vision and learning

Carol identified several initiatives during the early phase of her appointment as vehicles she used for building her leadership and management profile. There has been a long tradition at Kent that staff meetings are for administration and that they finish by 4pm. In her previous school, Carol introduced professional development as a component of staff meetings. She shared this practice with staff at Kent and was promptly told “we tried that 20 years ago and it didn’t work”. There was “immediate resistance and reaction to training and development which is real,…but I’ve got these pictures of where I want to be [and] one step at a time and eventually it will happen”. In relation to visions [pictures] for the school, Carol has two in particular that formed the early core of her role and continue to do so. The first of these is challenging the secondary pedagogy used in the secondary section of the school. “I have a problem with the way students are not engaged in the secondary school by, I would say, the majority of teachers”. Linked to this is the way Carol believes textbooks dominate teaching and have a powerful trickle down impact in the school:

I upset somebody greatly very early in my tenure here by saying, if I had my way I’d burn all the textbooks in the school. I said [they] could keep one copy for staff reference and, ho, ho that was just useless.

Carol believes that through “taking on” secondary pedagogy and textbooks as key vehicles for constructing her role, she is doing so from a perceived deficit base in the eyes of at least some staff. Carol’s formal training is primary teaching and her appointment prior to Kent, as already documented, was as a primary principal. “It was very much that trepidation about how I get my ‘street cred’ with the secondary section of the school because they knew that I was coming from a primary school and I was a primary teacher”. One thing that Carol has done since arriving at the school to build up her “street cred” with the secondary staff is taking:

relief lessons in the secondary area and actually being able to do it and not just baby-sit but actually work with students and do things and mark their work and be around and be mobile.

Taking secondary relief lessons for Carol is “a more subtle way” of bringing about change rather than turning people off by direct confrontation. However, when she thinks it necessary, she will confront issues — “you have to say, yeah I’m the person who’s driving this [process of change]”.

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The second major challenge that Carol identified for her principalship of Kent in relation to vision and learning, is reforming the middle school. For Carol the current middle school is “a joke”:

Kent talks about having a middle school and we have a middle school and we have had a middle school coordinator for about the last seven years, but the only thing that they’ve done towards middle school is have the year sevens in the main secondary block and being on a secondary timetable.

Carol has some definite views about the key things that need to change for authentic middle schooling to occur at Kent like “time chunking lessons, reducing the number of staff students interact with and changing methodologies”. Carol claims that she is prepared to be patient and to work to an extended timeline to achieve the changes she believes need to happen with middle schooling at Kent.

**Leading**

Carol draws upon her experience base, observations she has made of leaders she has worked with, and a number of analogies like “water dripping on a rock and one step at a time” to frame her approach to leadership. “I’ve looked at leaders that I’ve worked with and pulled the bits that I think I really admired and I thought worked really well… as well as just being the person I am”. For Carol:

leadership is that stuff about having a vision and having runs on the board and credibility with people so that you are seen as somebody who knows what they’ve got and having a picture of what should happen and being able to inspire people to actually follow the journey.

Carol seems to be aware in constructing her role of the tension between how she sees herself and how others see her. Receiving feedback from a staff member in a survey that said “the principal is unapproachable” made Carol “horrified and it really upset me and I thought, well that would be the last thing that I would see”. As for the issue of gender, there is difference of perception evident that has implications for constructing the role of principal.

**Organising**

For Carol, “management is the day-to-day nitty gritty, making sure that you have got electricity and water and all the facilities and so on, and managing the human resources in the best way you can”. Carol says she uses consultations, discussions, floating ideas
and demonstrating different ways of teaching to progress her role as principal. She also relies very significantly on colleagues in the District Education network for support and testing ideas. When it is difficult to engage people in issues, whether staff or members of the Governing Council, Carol:

> tends to manufacture situations where people have got to get together in small groups and talk about things and come back and feed it in. It really is being strategic and I guess being organised and knowing the culture of the place and all those sorts of things to move that on.

While Carol uses a number of approaches to enjoin staff and community in discussions about the vision and operations of the school, and while some of these are participatory in nature, Carol also believes that as principal she needs to “be able to focus and to really make decisions and not phaff around—phaffing drives me nuts”. What is phaffing? Carol explains it as:

> well this looks really good, and you start this, and then oh let’s do this, then this will be a really good thing, and then 10 minutes down the track, then we go on and do this, and nothing is ever achieved. Everything, you know, we start doing lots of stuff but nothing is ever achieved and, yeah, it’s totally disorganised.

This apparently unique and idiosyncratic term appears to encapsulate for Carol her frustration at processes that consume time but produce very little in terms of outcomes that are productive.

**Community**

Carol believes that she is aware of the need to ensure she has a base for constructing and profiling herself and her role as a principal out in the community. “You have to be seen to be of the community, of the staff, but not with them, or with them but not of them”. This stance sounds quite theological in its framing?

> Yeah, almost. You’re part of the group and you’re the leader of the group and you all work together for this outcome which is the benefit of the students, but you’re not really right in the inner circle, you’re there because you’re the principal, but you’re not part of their lives.

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1 phaffing: The Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary (1990) defines piaffe /piaffed, piaffing as follows: 1. (of a horse) to lift each pair of diagonally opposite legs in succession, as in the trot, but without going forwards, backwards, or sideways. 2. to move slowly forwards, backwards, or sideways in this manner.
Carol believes that “in a rural context, you don’t have anonymity. It [school principalship] is a much more complex thing in a rural community, and I believe, [this is] because you are seen all the time and people talk about it”. Carol joined the local town development group soon after arriving at the school:

I thought well if they’re going hear stories about me at the pub, these people can see me as a person…so I made sure that I was seen as somebody who was interested in the community and willing to get involved.

In essence, Carol sometimes intentionally locates herself physically and intellectually outside of the confines of the school structures so that the community can observe her and form views of her somewhat free from the mediated and managed parameters of school structures and processes.

As well as moving out into community spaces and contexts, Carol constructs her role through creating opportunities for community to come into school, either individually, as groups or as associations. Two illustrations of this are Remembrance Day and Adult Learners Week. In relation to the former, after a service involving staff and students as well as local residents, Carol “made sure all the oldies came in for morning tea and sat and talked… it’s being conscious of being available and aware and having a profile in the community that I think gives me credibility as somebody who cares”.

**Learnings for the next leadership position**

Notwithstanding that Carol’s term at Kent to date has involved her in some protracted issues including working with some people “who if they don’t hear what they want to hear, it means they’re not being told anything”, Carol claims that she “would probably do the same sorts of things that [she has] done at Kent” if she went to another leadership position. However, she says that she would be:

a bit wiser in my, you know, be more aware of the persona and the actual practice, that tension between how I see myself and how other people see me, be more aware of that dynamic that’s in play. I would be more aware of the need to be one step removed from staff in terms of social interaction.

In addition, Carol would repeat what she has done at Kent in terms of “nur[t]ing really strong networks of colleagues through the district and the cluster leadership which has been the saving grace. I mean, that’s what kept me sane all last year for sure”.

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Wickes School

Summary Version of Constructing the Role of Principal

Bob in many ways is a reluctant principal because his first passion is to be with students all day every day dealing with their learning and their personal growth. A major fire at the school that destroyed an historic building and all of the generations of memories associated with it has proved to be a seminal turning point for Bob and the way he sees himself and his role. Committed to the community before the fire, Bob is now doubly so and his determination to come out of the fire experience with a better school for the students and the town than before, pervades all he thinks about and does as a principal. Bob openly enjoys being in and with the community — it is home in a deep sense. He frequently and confidently moves into community places and spaces like football clubs and shops and shares his time and stories with parents of students and other people. Bob uses writing about students and their learning as a key way to construct and convey his role as principal.

Detailed Version of Constructing the Role of Principal

Framing into the role

Bob has been principal of Wickes for 5 years. It is his second appointment as a principal. His previous principalship was of a one-teacher school “which I loved but couldn’t see that the community had a sustainable future…so I threw my hat in the ring for Wickes”. Before becoming a principal, Bob had often thought about school leadership but was worried about losing direct contact with students. The appointment of counsellors in primary schools provided him with the opportunity to stay in contact with students but also observe leadership and management of a school from a new vantage point — “I think the most privileged position I was in and the one with the most significance to make most difference for whole school change was the counsellor role”. At Wickes, behaviour management “is a significant thing…[it is] an ongoing theme throughout [the school] and it does demand time”. Because of Bob’s experience as a counsellor he is “really very protective of the [role]…I try not to have our counsellor deal with the reactive stuff and so I try and take that on”.

Bob draws his personal and professional support for his role as principal from connecting with colleagues in the district who have credibility — people who have done the ‘hard yards’ and are prepared to stay the course — not “those who are there to
promote themselves”. He also relies very heavily on classroom visits and regular writing. Each week Bob produces a bulletin of observations and ideas for staff and their comment. In addition Bob “expects each staff member at the end of each term to write a reflection on themselves in their role and sometimes…gives the headings [for them to use]”. The writing becomes the focus of the next performance meeting. Bob produces his “own reflections and put[s] them out for people so they’ve got an opportunity to see what is in my head rather than guess”. Bob does this because:

I want to be perceived that if there’s something happening in the school, I want people to know about it and I want them to know why, and I want to know how we can make the best out of that.

Bob appears to be an exponent of what could be termed a ‘minimum surprises approach to principalship’.

**Vision and learning**

Prior to the fire, Bob had initiated an extended consultation [18 months] with parents, staff and students to develop a set of core values for the school. They are “persistence, team work, respect, learning, pride, success and care”. The values, derived in part form Bob’s previous experience with the four power social justice model of the Brotherhood of St Laurence — power over decision making, power over information, power over resources and power over relationships — play a “huge part” in the way Bob constructs his role as principal:

Whenever I have a dilemma and I don’t know which way to go, then I’ll look at where [does] the respect come in, or where’s the school pride in this, so I use it [the set of school values] regularly.

In leading the values development process, Bob considered words like ‘excellence’ but in the end opted for “words that are more accessible to kids and can be remembered and be recalled more easily”, and this position is also illustrative of the priority that Bob assigns to children and their needs and issues.

When Bob was arranging staffing for 2006, he “took on the special education role because [of wanting] to hook back into learning. I felt a lot of my time was taking me away from learning, so I wanted to hook back into classes with individual kids”. The fire forced this decision to be changed but students and learning are central to how Bob constructs his role. So too are teachers and their well being and performance. “The
hours between 8.30 and 4.00 I see are teacher and kid time and so while I’ve got admin stuff, it’s never a priority”. Bob usually does “admin stuff” in the late afternoon of each work day and at home he uses some of his time to “reflect on the big picture because that sort of stuff actually energises me”. Bob has an articulated schema for how his finite time each day will be used.

**Leading**

For Bob, “managers manage things and leaders lead people” and people for Bob very much includes his students. On the day I interviewed Bob he welcomed me dressed as a Native American, his contribution to Bookweek:

> connecting with kids is the most important thing I do and there are days when I think for some reason I haven’t spent any positive time with a child in the school, and that’s because maybe I got caught up managing.

Notwithstanding this, Bob acknowledges that schools require a great deal of organisational work to be done otherwise they won’t function effectively — he often asks himself if he is getting “caught up in the thick of too many thin things?”

Bob was born and raised in a small country town and has taught only in rural and regional locations. He sees leadership in a community as a “privilege”:

> The role of leader in a rural community is about people, you cannot divorce yourself from people… there’s that understanding about surveillance and I understand I’m on show so I really take that responsibility seriously [and] you’ve got to have fun.

Bob’s stance on leadership appears to be, “well if I’m a reasonable person, it doesn’t matter what setting I’m in”. When invited to complete the statement “the role of a principal in a rural community is…”, Bob said, “leading the learning through connecting with the community”. Bob has definite views about leaders and credibility in rural communities:

> it’s about being in the school for the right purpose and that purpose being to support and lead kids’ learning to be good positive community members… not blowing in for a year or two… and not being anonymous but basically contributing something.

Bob uses a range of images and metaphors to articulate his role as principal and, by implication, some of the ways he constructs it. Prior to the fire, Bob described his
leadership style as being like “a sheepdog where you run behind and, you know, where you want to just yip and yap at people’s heels and they move in the right direction”. The fire has made him develop a “far more upfront” style of leadership. After reflecting on the transcript of the interview, Bob changed his leadership style metaphor to:

‘lighthouse keeper’ — a person who has the role of keeping the light glowing to show the way, to help people overcome the hazards, to support those who take risks on their journey of discovery, to keep the shore [where we are] and the horizon [where we want to be] visible to the travellers [school community] and helping them reach it.

It seems from the feedback on the interview transcript that Bob is engaged in a process of continuous reflection on his leadership style.

Organising

While placing his priority as a rural principal on working directly with people, Bob is also aware that it is relatively easy in a school, and particularly one involved in a major rebuilding program, for the demands on resources — financial, physical, time and personnel — to outstrip what resources are available. To demonstrate his concern to staff about ideas and issues having the potential to overwhelm resources, Bob “painted some rocks and presented them to staff” and then showed that “the rocks don’t fit into the container [our resources] no matter how you juggle them”. Bob is mindful when identifying the rocks that the state department contributes to the pile as well, sometimes in unexpected ways. Mixing imagery, Bob sees himself:

as a bit of a thermometer on how things are going [and to help with this Bob has] two or three key people on staff who I trust and will confide in me [and give him] an accurate picture if I don’t sense it. I am prepared to be the buffer but I also want to share ownership and the ride with other people… managing issues is about having some fair processes in place and giving people a fair hearing… anytime you fob [an issue] off, it bites you on the bum.

Community

The fire has been the defining event of Bob’s term as principal:

a huge impact, amazing impact and not all of it negative. I can remember [date and time] of the morning, sitting out there under the pergola watching the building burn and it was then I thought well this was where I really want to be and my legacy is going to be rebuilding. And I looked around and saw people openly weeping and crying and I thought, well you come to school day to day and you take for granted how important a school is to a community. And there were grandparents, they could tell me which room
that they were in and who their teacher was… and it was really quite moving.

Bob is very pleased that the school’s mascot was saved in the fire—“a little doll…made by a Learning Assistance Parent…for one of our kids who just needed a boost in self esteem”. The mascot has been “renamed Phoenix Rose and we’ve done a profile about [her] rising from the ashes and that our spirit will rise again”. The positives from the fire for Bob and his leadership include engagement with community and the chance to design learning areas to better suit the needs of students and teachers.

**Learnings for the next leadership position**

For Bob, “a principal is only as good as the staff that they have, and so [it is essential to] invest time in nurturing the talents of staff and getting the staff working cohesively in the same direction”. Working through a set of values for the school community and staying closely in touch with students are two key things that Bob would take into another leadership position—“I want to make sure that kids [are] not disadvantaged”. As well, Bob sees having a “genuine positive regard for the people that you’re working with and for” as very important, and also sensitively managing contexts where “people are really operating at a high energy level, but it’s a fine line to burn out, so it’s just getting that balance”.

**Grantham School**

**Summary Version of Constructing the Role of Principal**

*Ivan essentially constructs his role of rural principal in three main ways. Firstly, he focuses on improving the design and decor of classrooms and this is something he started doing virtually since day one of his time at Grantham. This focus is underpinned by a very strong belief that there is a positive relationship between quality built facilities and student behaviour. Secondly, Ivan gives a very high priority to raising student achievements. To secure this outcome, Ivan introduced teacher performance expectations and accountability for Grantham’s Year 12 students’ results based upon external senior secondary assessments. Thirdly, Ivan spends substantial time in the community talking and socialising with individuals and organisations that he believes have the capacity to ‘make projects happen’ like a new community stadium for the district. He believes that change is achieved by working with acknowledged community*
leaders and influencers and positioning the school, its plans and potential in their decision-making contexts.

Detailed Version of Constructing the Role of Principal

Framing into the role

Ivan has been principal of Grantham for 4 years. Prior to accepting the position, he worked in the state department of education in the staffing area for two years and had also spent over 20 years in a wide range of roles in an Area School. “It had always been one of [Ivan’s] ambitions to…. come back to the country to finish [his] career”. He had considered a number of possibilities but when offered Grantham, made up his mind to accept within 24 hours. Ivan “lives away from home five days a week” to be the principal of Grantham but confesses to “being thrilled to pieces” that he made the decision to become principal of Grantham. Living away from home has some negatives “as far as family relationships are concerned” but it “is fantastic as far as a work environment is concerned…. it really means that during the week I can give [the] job [my] all and that has been good”.

At the start of his time as principal, Ivan was told by the visiting school photographer that he must be “a man who likes a challenge—[Grantham] is hardly a school with a great reputation”. A year later the same photographer said “the place had really turned the corner”. For Ivan, when he came into the role, one of his key objectives was to focus on the physical aspects of the learning spaces — “if we can make sure that our kids value their learning environment, then we are actually also developing an ethos about the place that will improve it for them as learners and also for the people who work here”. When Ivan started at Grantham, he also resolved to himself to take things quietly “but short-changed that by probably the best part of six months because [he] just became impatient”.

Vision and learning

For Ivan, vision is often embodied in projects that he is driving to improve the school context and, through this, the learning of students. It is also embodied in the efforts that are made to project the school into the local and wider community. This was particularly the case during the first year of Ivan’s appointment:
I relentlessly pursued press coverage... part of the condition [of organising an event] is you’ve got to be willing to write it up and make sure you’ve got photographs. One of the challenges was to make sure that we were getting known around the place and that our successes were trumpeted.

In terms of Ivan and his understanding of vision for Grantham, “it hasn’t just been here’s what we’re going to do — there was a concerted effort [that focussed on] where do we want this place to be in three or four years”. Ivan sees himself as “the voice of the school...who is quite often the one selling new ideas”. These new ideas often include giving prominence to learning and associated student behaviour issues.

An example of promoting learning at Grantham is making a virtue of the relatively small size of Grantham rather than seeing it as a negative — “we use [our size] to suggest that we are large enough to have the full range of subjects, small enough to still worry about every individual kid in our school”. Ivan has set as one of his learning benchmarks that Year 12 results “are as good as the state average”. One thing Ivan has done since becoming principal of Grantham, which he appears to value, is:

make sure that during the course of the year that we monitor individual students but we also call our staff in and say, ok where do you reckon your kids are sitting at the moment, do you reckon you can extract some improvement, what do you think is necessary, do you need outside help, what is it that we need to [do] to lift this?

Ivan believes that “there is no point having the data come into your school and not use it”. Notwithstanding this, Ivan also believes that there have been:

some really good results over the last couple of years, and subject areas that previously had given us trouble and they were predominantly our maths and science, are now up there, they’re not necessarily our battering ram results, but they’re very respectable.

An important aspect of Ivan’s role as a principal in terms of learning seems to be responding to employment opportunities in the community. An example of this is the development of a:

CAD lab — our kids do not have access to that sort of technology at the moment, and we hear from our employer groups around the place that if we can provide those kids with those skills, they’re virtually assured of jobs... so we will certainly introduce that.


Chapter 4: The Interviews

**Leading**

Ivan understands leadership as:

actually being able to inspire, to get people to rise above, to create an ethos, to have people accept change, and those sorts of things… one of the multitude of hats that I wear has got to be…. educational leader.

Ivan’s approach to leading and leadership is underpinned by “the fish philosophy”, which is derived from a fish market in the United States where people selling fish decided to do something to reduce the boredom of their jobs. Essentially the fish philosophy is about taking something fairly ordinary and routine — like selling fish — and “making someone’s day, of actually choosing your own attitudes and those sorts of things”. An example given by Ivan of the philosophy in practice is “that nobody hangs their dirty washing out in public”.

Another aspect of Ivan’s approach to leading is “float[ing] a lot of ideas — not all of them have rain fall upon them and grow”, often in the school’s newsletter, at meetings of the Governing Council and with staff. One idea that has taken hold after initially “go[ing] down like a lead balloon” is a proposal for a community stadium which Ivan sees having “potential to draw sporting competitions and those sorts of things into Grantham and the greater community and that it might also mean eventually that tourism…will be bolstered as a result”.

**Organising**

For Ivan “management is just carrying out those routine things, and making sure that they happen efficiently, properly and all that sort of stuff”. Paradoxically, given how much of the interview with Ivan focussed on projects and finance, management is also “the sorts of things that we have little control over”. One of the “routine things” that Ivan has elevated to a high priority is improving the appearance of classrooms — “we started with the little bits that you can achieve” which led to introducing a classroom refurbishment plan. Grantham had “money…sitting in the reserves that we could release to fire that up”. To allay community fears that Ivan was spending curriculum money on facilities, he worked on “educating [the] community to understand just exactly what the cash flow of the school is [because] something like 90% of [Grantham’s] budget is sort of that which you have little control over like wages… and utilities”.

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Ivan has introduced and uses a number of structures to help with the organisational aspects of the school such as “daily bulletins to weeklies to 8.30 morning staff meetings to staff meetings for training and development”. In addition he meets with non-teaching staff like the farm manager [the agriculture and viticulture programs], front office manager and the groundsperson. Ivan “line manages each of the educational leaders [as well as those listed previously] and acknowledges that the arrangements are essentially “pyramidal”.

Consistent with his view of wanting to have things happen efficiently, Ivan sees part of his role as being “willing to take the rap eventually and [my] oft stated viewpoint on this is that it doesn’t matter what happens in the school that goes wrong, ultimately [it’s] my responsibility”. While Ivan did not make any reference to what happens when things go right, it can be reasonably assumed from other comments made by him during the interview — such as those from the return visit of the school photographer as recorded earlier — that the same applies.

**Community**

Ivan has a strong belief that the community ought to be in no doubt about who is principal of the school:

> I make sure that the community understands that I’m not the Methodist Minister because I walk around with a collar and tie on all week … [because] people ought to able to walk into a school and, at a glance, work out who’s likely to be the boss.

As well, Ivan believes that “it is a very much in the interests of a rural principal to know who the people are who shape the thoughts of the community”. To achieve this, Ivan creates opportunities for the community to be able to see and know the principal in different contexts, such as community development board meetings and the hotel:

> Thursday night is always my ‘be seen in the pub night’ and I don’t necessarily go to the other hotels in other communities, but…if we get the opportunity, we’ve actually taken our [staff] dinners into the other communities…that’s all part of it, to be seen as a human being.

In rural areas, Ivan believes it is essential to be aware “that people are going to be naturally curious [and that] communities are pretty close knit”. Even though Ivan does not live full time in the Grantham community, rural principalship provides “an
opportunity to be much more part of our communities out here than we ever would in the city”. Ivan acknowledges that rural communities can present substantive challenges for young teachers who, if working in the city, would probably have no contact with students outside of school:

Young teachers when they come to the country, because they’re in the position where they are socialising in the local pubs and stuff like that and it’s quite possible that there are under age kids in there as well and so this is also part of the role of being a rural leader, is to make those young people aware of the fact that, just the same as I’m under the microscope with my behaviours, so they are, and no that doesn’t mean to say they can’t have a life, but they have got to structure their life so that they’re not risking their own professionalism by what they do.

Ivan recognises that this is a difficult issue — “we spent a bit of time on [it] last year and it was a bit prickly in a couple of instances where people wanted to challenge the [position]”.

For Ivan, rural communities “tend to be conservative [and] even lag a bit as far as developing egalitarian values and those sorts of things” are concerned. From this, he believes that gender can be an issue when it comes to rural school leadership — “there is a very strong belief in a lot of areas, and I don’t think Grantham is any different, that a male principal is probably the way to go”. Ivan finds this “really interesting” because his predecessor was female, and his successor is female. Ivan has been asked “what sort of job his replacement will do?...[and said] I think we’ve got to assume that she will be fantastic”.

**Learnings for the next leadership position**

One of the things that Ivan would do if he was going to another leadership position would be to “suss out … and fairly quickly get to find out who the people are that you work with who have got some contacts out there in the community”. Ivan’s main reason for saying this is:

Whatever it is, you need to know who the movers and shakers are so that you can then use those contacts to shape them and their thinking to get to the end points that you reckon are going to enhance your school.

Having a detailed knowledge of how staffing is allocated and costed out to schools is another thing that Ivan would want to take into another position. This is because Ivan
believes that his ‘inner knowledge’ of how the state department staffing operations function has benefited Grantham during his time as principal — “[it] was one of the huge advantages that I had when I arrived here”. Thirdly, as a result of having to manage some complex staff performance issues during his term as principal at Grantham, Ivan said he would like to see:

the system doing some sort of aptitude testing for potential teachers… if we are taking on board people who are battling their own depression or mental health or whatever, the opportunities for them to succeed under the pressure that [rural] schools put them in is pretty minimal.

This is an interesting statement from at least two perspectives. Firstly, it suggests that Ivan may advocate for personnel policy change at a systemic level, perhaps as some part of an agreement to accept another appointment as a principal and especially at a school where it is known there are serious personnel issues, which the current policy settings seem unable to rectify. Secondly, the statement could be interpreted as a genuine learning from being principal of Grantham but without any intention of making it a condition of a future appointment.

Milton School

Summary version of Constructing the Role of Principal

Sarah is a novice principal on a very steep learning curve. She is principal of the school she was appointed to as a new graduate 3 years ago. Sarah’s time and experience as a teacher is the major resource she draws upon to construct her role as principal of a rural school ‘in a paddock’. For Sarah, her young age, gender, the fact that she does not live in the designated principal’s house in the school grounds and her desire not to spend every weekend at community sports events, creates a problematic context for her to develop her role. In Sarah’s mind, she works both hard and long hours and believes that this should be sufficient evidence of her commitment to the community. Given Sarah’s limited experience in schools, the majority of issues that she deals with as principal are approached on a ‘give it a go, see what I can do for students’ basis. Sarah’s disposition appears to be one that is open and candid about her limited experience - she believes she has nothing to lose by ‘having a go’ at being a rural school principal.
Chapter 4: The Interviews

Detailed Version of Constructing the Role of Principal

Framing into the role

Sarah is the Acting Principal of Milton. At the time of interview, Sarah had been principal for nearly half a year. She graduated from university in 2002 and was appointed to Milton as a teacher of Languages Other than English (LOTE) in 2003. The following year she became the Secondary Coordinator of the school. Milton is her sole experience as a professional educator. Being principal of a school very early in her career was not something that Sarah ever thought about until “the opportunity just came up and it was too good to not take it”. Sarah is glad she has taken the position but also recognises that she has not had a lot of time to prepare for being a principal — “I’m just thinking about those things [the job] and trying to work it out as I go”. The thought of becoming a principal at such a young age was “quite scary” for Sarah but when she reflected on what she had done during her two years as a Coordinator and that she was in practice “second in charge after the substantive principal and [had] had a lot of conversations and that sort of thing…it was something [Sarah] thought she could do”.

Sarah sees it as “fortunate” that for her first appointment as a principal she didn’t have to move to a new school, despite having experienced some negatives moving from being known as a teacher to assuming total responsibility for the school. Sarah believes that the time she was able to spend observing and working with the former principal has been especially useful for helping her work her way into being the principal of Milton:

I was lucky [in being able] to watch the previous principal and I’d seen what worked well, what had been difficult, and I’d sort of been able to learn from someone’s else’s mistakes, not that I don’t make mistakes, because I do, but I’d had that sort of benefit of not going in completely blind.

There were some problematic dimensions to becoming the principal of Milton for Sarah. Parent views of a young person not long out of university becoming principal weighed on Sarah’s mind as she thought about developing her interpretation of the role — “a lot them, I think, struggled to change their headsets” about her and she remembers hearing “a few people mak[ing] comments that we want a real principal, not a teacher stepping up to be a principal”. Sarah’s response to this kind of remark — judgement? — was to reflect on how you become a principal:
where do they think principals come from, you know, that’s how you become a principal, by being a teacher and stepping up and, you know, there’s no principal school, that’s just how it works, you just learn it as you go and you’ve got to start somewhere and Milton is one of those schools where, I mean I don’t have the stats but, almost every single principal the school’s had, it has been their first principal appointment, but because most of them have come in from other schools and they’ve been older [and male?], I suppose…it’s been easier for people to go, yes, they’re the principal.

Another problematic aspect of Sarah’s entry into the role of principal was caused by it being designated as acting — “it’s not an ongoing position, there’s no certainty as to how long [you’ll] be here for”. Her attitude to this and other commentary she became aware of in relation to her elevation to principal at such a young age is to essentially acknowledge its existence but try to not allow it to deflect her focus on children and their learning.

Vision and Learning

For Sarah, the education of the students is her number one priority although as principal, Sarah says there are “lots of things you have to do and it’s not always directly related to the students”. Examples of these given by Sarah included “promotion of the school or staffing or cleaning”. When dealing with these kinds of matters, which in practice do impact on students, Sarah believes it is important “to keep the students as your focus”. A significant shaper of Sarah’s vision for the school is the demographics of the area. Sarah appears to be acutely aware that the school’s enrolment has dropped to as low as 50 and that the consequences of this, if it happened again, would be very substantial in terms of the range and depth of learning that could be provided. A key aspect of her vision then “is keeping the school going and thinking of how you can keep students at Milton and how you can attract students to [it]”. Putting this aspect of her vision for the school into practice — maintaining its viability — Sarah has embarked on a promotional campaign using radio interviews and has allocated some time on a weekly basis for the librarian to undertake promotional activities about the school, even though she is aware that attracting students into the school is unlikely to happen unless families move into the community.

When focussing on learning and her role as principal, Sarah “automatically sort of think[s] from a teacher perspective”. By this she means she listens to students, looks at
what they are interested in, what they want to learn and tries to “make an effort to accommodate those interests”. While doing this, she also focuses on supporting teachers and other staff involved with students because, although the school has small classes, there is a comparatively high percentage of students who require (and are entitled by system policy and through allocated resources) to receive dedicated assistance with their learning needs. The individual attention given to students is not only directed at their learning but also at “keeping [them] at school” which in turn helps to keep up enrolments and therefore the level of resource allocations more generally. As principal of one of the smallest all-age schools in the state, Sarah seems to be particularly aware of the nexus between numbers of students and overall school viability.

**Leading**

Sarah’s approach to leading the school is underpinned by what could be described as an open and candid self-assessment of her experience and her expertise:

> I figure I’ve got nothing to lose…. they know that I’ve got no experience [as a principal], they know I haven’t done it before, you know, you do your best and you are going to make mistakes, but I certainly think I do have a lot to offer and I can make some positive changes and you just sort of have that belief in yourself that you can make some positive differences.

One of the things that Sarah appears to draw strength from for her role in leading the school came from what someone said at a professional development activity when she was a Coordinator — “when you’re the leader it’s always your turn”. In practice for Sarah this means “you can’t sit back and expect someone else to do it…you always have to be enthusiastic to do things and try new things and embrace things because you’re supposed to be the inspiration…the driving force”. Sarah says she has to temper this stance with the fact that there are times when things get you down as a principal.

Sarah’s approach to leadership also includes involving others in decision making “depend[ing] on the particular decision and the circumstance”. Her focus here is to “try to involve them in [the decision] otherwise they don’t have ownership of it and they are not as likely to support it”. In what appears to be a participatory approach to decision making, Sarah sometimes presents a situation and invites others “to come up with the ideas rather than putting [them] in their head”. One aspect of leading the school which Sarah seems to be especially aware of is the visibility dimension of being principal; she
“sort of feel[s] like [she is] always being watched and…always on show”. The matter of visibility is taken up again in the section headed community.

**Organising**

In relation to constructing her role as principal through the organisational dimensions of the school, Sarah essentially takes things as they come and one step at a time — “I didn’t walk into being principal with a big map of these are all the different areas that need to be organised and within those areas, this is what needs to be done”. Sarah refers to her time as a student to assist her to encapsulate how she would approach organising the school if she was to continue as principal and was able start a year rather than take up the position part way through when many routines have been agreed:

> you would try to sort of set it up…like you do when you are studying, you put all your assignments when they’re due on this big calendar…I sort of do that [now] as much as I can but all the time there’s new things popping up.

During her time as principal, Sarah has worked through complex staffing requirements involving maternity leave entitlements for the following year, and introduced new policies like one called sun smart which entailed new hats being purchased for students. In both instances, Sarah involved staff and sought volunteers to work with her and contacted other schools in the district so that she had other options to draw on for the Milton context.

**Community**

Sarah believes that keeping the community informed about what is happening at the school and what are the possibilities for involvement will lead to the community being “more likely to take an interest in Milton and also be supportive of what we do here”. Her understanding of the community is shaped in part by the reception she received when she was appointed as the LOTE teacher for the school — “everyone was like, we don’t want a LOTE teacher, we want a PE teacher, and you know, why do our kids have to learn this crap, you know, to be blunt, I never learnt it, I’m ok”. Sarah’s response to this was to work hard, work with parents and try to change perceptions about a second language.

So for becoming principal there have been some parallels with Sarah’s reception as a teacher of Japanese. There have been comments from the community about wanting a
male principal and “somebody who’s going to live in the school house and with the community”. Each of these requirements seems to have had an impact on the contextual climate in which Sarah works as a principal. From Sarah’s perspective both have unfairness characteristics associated with them: gender because she is a female, and living location because her partner also works and they have agreed to reside together and commute daily to their places of employment.

Even though Sarah’s first experience of the community was somewhat oppositional to her being a teacher of LOTE, her view is that “pressure from the community generally isn’t so much about the learning program”. The pressure that appears to weigh most on Sarah and her role as principal focuses on her domestic arrangements and those of some of the staff and, in particular, their preparedness to be involved on weekends with sporting events, for example — “there’s negativity from some of the community toward staff members not living near the school and not coming to the football on weekends [which] gets teachers down”. Sarah believes it unreasonable that the community doesn’t appreciate that she needs private time away from the community in order to do a good job of being principal of Milton:

[I need] my relax time…it gets me down, you know you think, no matter how hard I work, they’re still going to have this negativity because of this thing I can’t help and I’m not going to change and I can’t change and that’s difficult.

In contrast to Sarah’s views about community expectations and ‘her time’, she recognises that there are also “experts in the community who can come in and actually educate the kids on particular things”, like revegetation and soil erosion by wind, two very relevant issues given the nature of the rural location of Milton. She attempts to make ‘community experts’ welcome and valued within the school.

In Sarah’s view, the location of the school brings with it unique challenges for a principal because there is no town or recognised centre around which to build a profile outside the school precinct. The one place where many of the community gather, a hotel, raises some quite problematic issues because “you’re putting yourself in a situation where you’re going to see aspects of students’ [and parents’] lives that can compromise you”. Sarah’s response to not having a high profile in the community is to have a consistent presence at the school — “I work late at night and I always encourage
parents to phone up and discuss things with me or come and see me”. Sarah sees it as important to regularly remind herself as she focuses on the community and works at her role of principal that there also some “open minded and supportive” people in the community but they are not always “vocal about their views” like “those who do have a lot of time on their hands”.

**Learnings for the next leadership position**

Sarah seems to be fairly clear about some things that she has learnt from her time as principal of Milton that she would take into another leadership position. Rather than approaching changes incrementally — “in dribs and drabs” — Sarah says she would reflect on what she has been able to achieve at Milton and use this process to present an overall plan of action. Sarah would also very early in her new position “become familiar with the protocols of various things” — some experiences with her Governing Council where apparently some people have brought up issues outside of established processes and caused her to do “a fair bit of listening to stuff that didn’t need to be brought up” is the basis of the ‘get to know the protocols early’ learning. Thirdly, Sarah would talk about her vision for the school and of education with parents and community members and emphasise that “it takes the community to educate the child, not just a school”. Her aim in talking would be to “establish rapport with them as the principal and get their support and involvement and enlist their help”.

Within the school context specifically, Sarah says she would visit classrooms, make significant efforts to get to know students and staff and emphasise the value of them having “a lot of ownership over [the school]” and working together on “creating some long term plans”. Linked with this, she would take her “half glass full — working with what you have and trying to get the best out of what you do have” disposition to educational leadership into her next position. Notwithstanding some of the intense community scrutiny Sarah has felt she has been subjected to in her present position, she “would make an effort to be seen in the [new school’s] community”, on the assumption that her next leadership role will be at a school which is in a town or located very close to one and where there may also be opportunities to work collaboratively with other schools and colleagues.
Coles School

Summary Version of Constructing the Role of Principal

Geoff is a very experienced principal and has been an educator in rural contexts for 40 years. He believes that rural schools exist to support the needs and interests of students and the local community. To maximise this occurring, Geoff spends a substantial amount of his time working with staff to design and deliver a curriculum that will engage students in personally relevant learning. Though Geoff articulates a deep commitment to the community through both words and actions, he also sees his role of rural principal as bringing wider global perspectives to issues. He champions the resource needs of his school through district and state-wide departmental structures and processes. He appears prepared to advocate ‘the departmental line’ on matters up to the point where negative consequences for students and the town ‘kick in’. Geoff’s approach to decision making as a rural principal appears to be a strategic blend of participatory and authoritarian. The former apparently prevails until an issue of major personal and professional concern presents, where the risk of an outcome he does not agree with being produced has to be nullified.

Detailed Version of Constructing the Role of Principal

Framing into the role

Geoff has been principal of Coles for three years. Prior to his appointment at Coles, Geoff was principal at another Area School for 3 ½ years. Geoff has held various leadership positions in schools for about 30 years and at the time of interview had spent 40 years working in rural schools. Geoff believes that rural communities are “true communities where people support each other when the chips are down”. For Geoff, rural communities are places “which really give school leaders a chance to get in and feel part of the total community”. To be a principal of a rural school Geoff also believes that “you need to be available” which also means that students are likely to “know far more about you than they would in a city school and [therefore] one needs to be aware of the eyes on you”. Geoff’s way of handling this aspect of being a principal of a rural school is to make it known to students that “there are certain protocols that need to be observed by [them] in their relationship with [him]”. Given Geoff’s long career in small population rural contexts, he also sees being able to “separate the private life that you get to know about staff from the school life” as essential to constructing the role of principal.
Before taking up his posting to Coles, Geoff resolved to himself that he would not come in and start “sweeping everything clean” — rather he would take time to observe and once having made some assessment of what he saw, start working on new directions – “one needs to build and show credibility”. Geoff cannot “see any sense in just going in [and] upsetting staff [and] creating a massive upheaval”.

**Vision and learning**

Geoff takes a whole-of-school stance in his approach to vision and learning — “I’m chartered to be responsible for the total running of the school - I need to be aware and to have an influence on what is happening in each section [of the school]”. In terms of learning, Geoff sees himself as being “the servant of these kids”. However, in putting this position into practice, Geoff sees that there is also complexity in the school because of the large spread of student ages and because of the need to engage students in a curriculum that is relevant so that they do not become “disaffected”. What appears to be a key to the way Geoff approaches his role as principal and learning is providing a curriculum “that [will] support [students] to succeed”. Achieving this seems to involve a blend of interpreting local contexts and needs with looking at “the global picture” and from this working out ways of making subjects and courses available to students locally.

When once asked by a senior line manager what is the one thing he would like to be able to do with students, Geoff replied, “I’d pack all the kids on a liner and we’d do all of our studies at sea and then when we got to particular countries we’d explore”. The idea of education being about “giving the kids opportunities to explore” impacts on Geoff’s role as principal because he sees it as important that he assists staff in their thinking and teaching so that students, at least in part, experience education as an exploration of ideas and opportunities — “having conversations about their abilities…challenging staff to take up new fields or domains to overcome some of the insular sort of behaviours that can [occur]”. This approach is linked to a “very strong view that every student is an individual and we need to be working towards [them] being taught as individuals as closely as possible”.

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Leading

For Geoff leadership involves “working with people” not so much in a day-to-day detailed way but “more so on the thinking that goes behind it, the introduction of various aspects of educational thought…support and mentoring processes [that result in] betterment of student learning and in fact the better life chances of students”. Values are an important component of leading and Geoff believes that part of his role as a principal is “living the values” of the school which include care, respect, honesty, integrity and trust. One of Geoff’s personal values as it applies to his understanding of leading and leadership is success — “every student should be successful, every teacher should be successful in their classroom teaching…it’s the achieving of one’s best level”.

Organising

Geoff sees the organisational aspects of his role in a day-to-day time frame — “the nitty gritty actual running of the school”. Focussing on organising is essential for Geoff so that “leadership can take place [and] the school is not running around like a headless chook”. Moving around the school regularly and talking with teachers and students is a significant way that Geoff carries out his organising obligations. Another way is through a series of committees which deal with things such as staffing and finance. Usually Geoff seeks only to influence the decisions of the committees but acknowledges that sometimes he “can become quite adamant and goes wharfy”. ‘Wharfy’ reveals part of Geoff’s background from growing up in Port Adelaide during a time when there were frequent waterfront strikes by wharf labourers. ‘Wharfy’ means “I’ve got a line and I’m not going to budge from it”. An instance of ‘going wharfy’ occurred when Geoff took a stand, against committee advice, about the kind of staff replacement the school needed at a particular time in its change towards a greater vocational curriculum emphasis.

During the early period of his appointment to Coles, Geoff was concerned that his ideas for organising and leading the school seemed to be being ignored or rejected — “I just was not getting anywhere…and people [didn’t] want to effect change”. Reflecting on this, Geoff embraced Herrmann’s (1989) colours typology for people, which enabled him to “understand where people sat [in relation to issues]…and accept more how people work”. According to Herrmann, there are four primary colours — red, yellow, green and blue — and each corresponds to certain personality traits. Geoff essentially
uses two combinations in his overall approaches — red/yellow, “the more thinking as far as let’s go this way, let’s do this, let’s do that” and “green/blue people who tend to be more pragmatic, more we need it cut and dried”. Geoff sees himself as mainly red/yellow but “deep down there is [also] a bit of blue/green in [him]”.

**Community**

Geoff articulates two basic positions in terms of community that appear to shape the way he constructs his role. Firstly, “half the battle’s won if the community sees you in their community as a stable person who is working for the community and is participating in community activities”. Secondly, “the role of the school should reflect community needs”. In relation to the first position, Geoff works at presenting himself and his family as people who want to be in Coles and who have chosen to be there. Geoff is a member of a local service club and is team manager of the town’s colts football team but he is careful not to “spend massive amounts of time at the pub”, which would undermine building a credible profile for the school.

In relation to the second position, the town and district of Coles in recent years has undergone major economic renewal through the development of an aquaculture industry. The school played, and continues to play, an integral education and training role for the new industry. Coles offers industry and state school certificate approved vocational courses that prepare students for employment in aquaculture. The school has its own oyster lease and also works very closely with growers so that students can access the full range of industry level equipment and experiences to assist them to complete their studies to the required standard. However, because not all students who attend Coles want to be employed in aquaculture, Geoff sees part of his role being to “look at the global picture and look towards a curriculum which gives students the chance to fulfil university or TAFE entrance”. Delivering a diverse curriculum off a relatively small resource base means that Geoff frequently finds himself having to manage and mentor staff who have to teach outside of their specialist areas or their preferred teaching areas — “staff of our school have to be multi-skilled…we can’t afford the luxury anymore of having a pure physics teacher”.

Geoff uses visits to Adelaide during vacation periods or for conferences to meet and brief Central Office staff on what is happening at Coles. He sees this as a way of
keeping the needs of the community, as well as the school, in the foreground of people’s thinking who may have the opportunity to make decisions that affect his school — “it enables a much more personal working relationship with those people”. Geoff is “realistic [about what this approach may achieve] but we want our hat in the ring” and when you are a long way from the centre, this is a useful way of doing it. In addition, Geoff participates in the District Education structures and uses the expertise available to help him think about the kind of changes that will be needed to keep the school on an improvement orientation.

**Learnings for the next leadership position**

Geoff believes it is essential to “build and show credibility” but in another position he would like to do it “a little quicker” than he has at Coles. As well, he would “try to look at the structures in the school and what’s happening in the school and the essence of kids and parents a little quicker”. Thirdly, moving into another leadership position Geoff would also “get in and work with staff members and talk with staff members quicker than I did at Coles”. Finally Geoff would take the sense that the role of principal is more than a job — “you need to have a passion about kids and their learning” — with him into another position. Summarising, it appears as though Geoff would continue with the approaches he currently uses to construct the role of a rural school principal, but would accelerate their implementation in the next position.
Chapter 5: Interview Analysis — Constructing the Role of Rural Principal

Introduction
This chapter is a consideration and analysis of how rural principals construct their role based on five interview text organisers designed to assist with creating a faithful representation of each of the transcribed verbatim records of each interview. The five text organisers are: framing into the role, vision and learning, leading and organising, community, and learnings for the next leadership position. The organisers are derived from the design of the interview framework I developed for my research, as presented in Chapter 3. Framing into the role focuses on the thinking, experiences and influences that shaped the way principals interviewed say they approached and began to take up their roles. The focii of the other four organisers — vision and learning, leading and organising, community, and learnings for the next leadership position — are essentially encapsulated in the respective titles of each.

Framing into the role
For the two females in the interview group, gender is an issue that emerges in the framing into the role strand of role construction. Gender also emerges as an issue under other strands, and more is said about it later. For Sarah, the younger female who is also the least experienced member of the interview group, gender is an issue in terms of its apparent use by some members of the community as a basis for her rejection, or at least for questioning of her suitability for principalship. Sarah heard people say that they would prefer a male to be the principal of their school. This awareness of rejection seems to have invoked in Sarah an approach to the task of constructing the role of principal using essentially two ‘headsets’ — one is of the ‘I have nothing to lose by giving things a go’ kind; the other is shaped and driven by a resolve to prove to herself and the community that she can do the job of principal. For Sarah as well, rejection or at least ambivalence about her appointment by some sections of the community (and possibly staff though this did not manifest itself in the interview and subsequent follow up with Sarah) as a context against which to commence constructing her role, also emanated from the public knowledge that her appointment was an acting one; in essence...
‘real but not real’. This fact also appears to have reinforced the dual headsets she adopted at the start of her tenure as she began to construct her role.

In contrast to Sarah, Carol started her new appointment apparently unaware of the problematic status ascribed to gender, and females in leadership positions specifically, by substantial numbers of people within the community, and also within the school context itself. As well, Carol commenced her principalship at Kent believing that she had something to prove to herself and others, because she was formally trained as a primary teacher and had never held a leadership position that involved being a line manager for secondary teachers. Carol’s entry into the principal position at Kent has some similarity with Sarah’s experience because she too had to contend with what she interpreted as hostile dynamics, one of which she claimed throughout the interview and follow up as not being of relevance to her — gender. Having to respond to hostility and degrees of negativity from staff, plus her own internal benchmarks of personal success as a principal, apparently resulted in Carol resolving she would attempt to construct her competence in spite of a likely hostile context, or at best what she interpreted as a context that demanded that she prove herself on terms and conditions determined by ‘locals’.

For Carol then, what she reads and understands to be an unwelcoming context, in terms of the role of principal, seems to act as a motivator or an impetus for her to show she can do the job. She appears to enter into ‘her reading’ of the context and use it as something to assist her to construct the orientation, nature and resolve of her tenure as principal. For Carol and also for Sarah, it is as though the local community set their own tests about competence and worthiness to be the principal of ‘their’ school, in addition to them having to ‘pass’ a departmental competitive selection (test) process to attain their appointments.

In contrast to the contested and problematic framing into the role of rural school principal experienced by both of the female research participants, the three males did not report experiences which signalled that entry into their positions was similar to that of the female principals. This does not mean there was a total absence of judgements and commentary being made by local community members or existing staff about the appointments. Happenings in relation to the comings and goings of rural school
principals are essentially always newsworthy. However, what it probably means, and this can be said with reasonable confidence, is that if the male principals had similar experiences to the female principals, as recorded above, these did not register with them sufficiently to warrant reporting, even in a semi-structured interview where opportunity was frequently presented for participants to add to comments already made or to revise them, and to edit the final verbatim transcript and sign off before analysis commenced. It may also be confirmation that “male principals located in rural communities have historically been more able to control social space than their female counterparts” (Clarke & Stevens, 2006, p.14).

For Bob, framing into the role of principal at Wickes was dominated by his priority — his passion — for teaching and contact with students and fear that, if he was successful in his bid to become principal of the school, the role might take him away from daily and substantial contact with children. As well, Bob’s previous appointment was as principal of a one-teacher school, which he enjoyed greatly and which served to reinforce his belief that children had to always be his first priority as a principal. Both of these elements appear to have combined to produce an approach to constructing the role of principal at Wickes rural school that relegated the administrative aspects of principalship to a significantly lower level of relevance and time allocation than anything to do with the care and learning of students. In making this observation, it seems to be well understood by Bob that effective and efficient administrative practices may enhance the quality of students’ experiences of schooling. However, the desire to construct and be seen as constructing the role of principal based upon staying directly connected to students, rather than relying upon mediated connection through teachers, essentially framed Bob’s entry into the role of principal of Wickes.

On the other hand, Ivan’s framing into the role of principal of Grantham rural secondary school seems to be mix of three main influences. The first of these influences is fulfilling a professional need to have an experience that will round out and complete his career with the state department of education as principal of a rural school. When interviewed, Ivan emphasised this on several occasions. The second main influence that Ivan described in terms of framing into his role occurred very early in the first few weeks as principal of Grantham. He was told by a mobile school service provider that clearly he must like challenges because the school had a poor reputation. Thirdly, prior
to Ivan being appointed to Grantham, he was a staffing officer in the state department of education. This, Ivan asserts, enabled him to acquire information of both an official and unofficial kind that would normally not be available to principals of schools, because the main pathway to becoming a principal is through various school-based promotion positions. In addition to these three influences, Ivan also reported at the outset of his contribution to this research, that to become the principal of Grantham, he had to live separate from his family who remained in the city.

The three framing-into-the-role-of-principal influences, plus Ivan’s living arrangements, seem to coalesce to form an approach to constructing the role of principal characterised by a sense of urgency, a need to produce and publicise achievements, and a desire to have these acknowledged.

Geoff’s framing into his role as principal of Coles appears to have started with his decision to apply for the position when it became vacant — he claims he wanted the job very much and that he wanted to relocate into the community with his family to live and work there. The appointment to Coles is likely to be Geoff’s last one with the state department of education, given that at the time of interview he was in his fortieth year of employment. However, unlike Ivan, Geoff did not report needing or wanting to make his time at Coles some kind of career-culminating event. Geoff has spent all of his working life in rural communities. He believes that there is a sense of authenticity about people in rural communities that is less prevalent in urban and city contexts. While holding this view apparently quite strongly, Geoff also recognises that school principals in small communities like Coles have to live and work with relatively close scrutiny of their professional and personal lives as a condition of being a rural principal.

In terms of contributions to the construction of Geoff’s role as a rural principal, the early framing period contributes three things. First is a belief that being available and accessible are requisites for principalship in a rural context. Secondly, that translating this belief into practice is frequently a matter of balancing community profile considerations against privacy considerations. Thirdly, when contemplating changes within the school, such as curriculum options or staffing, it is prudent to take things slowly and consult rather than try to rush and overturn policies and programs that people have worked to achieve, even though you may disagree with them.
Chapter 5: Interview Analysis – Constructing the Role of Rural Principal

Discussion

The analysis of the first interview text organiser, *framing into the role* of rural principal, reveals six understandings about how principals of rural schools engage in constructing their roles. They are: responding to perceived gender-based resistance; proving worthiness for the position; fulfilling professional and personal goals; assigning highest priority to student learning needs and interests; balancing public and personal privacy; and pacing change. Reducing these to a single word in an attempt to capture the essence of each one, they become: gender, merit, fulfilment, learning, balance, and pacing.

The first two understandings are derived from the initial entry into the school and the community experiences of the two female principals interviewed. In both instances they were subjected to questioning and community discussions about their competence and suitability for appointment. They each recall experiencing varying degrees of personal hostility and rejection. Significantly for the purposes of this research, they also report experiencing degrees of hostility and rejection in terms of what type of person should undertake the role of principal of a rural school. While Wallin’s (2005, p.136) analysis of career patterns of rural female administrators in Saskatchewan and Texas suggests that “one of the greatest barriers to women in leadership roles in the rural context …[that is] practices [that] are patriarchal and promote stereotypical attitudes and androcentric ways of thinking [may be on the decline]”, it would appear that gendered stereotyping is a constituent feature of both the Milton and Kent communities. As well, Blackmore (1998), in her investigation of gender-based reform in educational change in Victoria, found that for a rural community where a school had built its reputation on firm discipline, all female leadership of the school was seen as distinctly negative by the locals; essentially evidence of changes having “ ‘gone too far’ ” (p.468).

Some aspects of the framing into the position by each of the females interviewed seem to be consistent with what has been reported as happening in other rural places. However, what does not seem to have been considered to date is how females who are appointed to be principals in rural contexts which are somewhat hostile and judgemental towards them, respond to these orientations of negativity and use them as a resource for how they construct their role.
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In the case of Sarah, as reported earlier, she adopted a ‘I have got nothing to lose and will give the job my best shot’ stance as her way of responding to the nature of the context into which she had been appointed. This disposition seems to act as a form of filter for how she approaches the construction of her role over time. While on the surface, it might be interpreted as perhaps being somewhat unprofessional, an alternative interpretation is that Sarah vernacularised how she experienced her ‘welcome’ and used this as a means to distance herself from the centre and force of the negativity. By adopting what might be called a disinterested position about the response she experienced to her appointment, she removed herself to some extent from the arena of debate and the risk of setting up a potential win–lose contest over her perceived ability or inability to be a principal of a rural school. In terms of framing into the position and how principals of rural schools construct their role, when confronted with an oppositional context, principals may have to adopt a take-it-or-leave-it survival stance in order to move beyond being captured by continuous questioning about worthiness and their suitability for the position.

Carol, on the other hand, appears to respond to how she interprets and articulates the problematic aspects of her entry into the role of principal of Kent by identifying projects and tasks which she believes will provide her with the means to demonstrate, perhaps to prove, that she has the ability to be the principal of a combined primary and secondary school. Blackmore (1998) has concluded from her research, in which some principals likened the move to local management to a market-driven model of education provision, that “the market is not gender neutral” (p.467). For Carol (and Sarah also), the context — market — which she entered as a principal was not gender neutral and, as it transpired, this seems to have significance for the construction of the role of rural principal for her in at least two ways.

The issue of gender is one that Carol asserts has never been for her, nor should be, a consideration in relation to influencing or constraining the way she constructs her leadership. Potentially, there seems to be an inherent strength as well as a weakness in this stance. The potential strength, it could be argued, is that Carol sets herself above or outside the issue of gender by refusing to recognise that it is a factor. In short, she appears to dismiss gender, even though for many others with whom she works and lives it appears to be an active constituent in the context within which she is constructing her
role. By dismissing or refusing to acknowledge gender, it could be interpreted that Carol is taking action to neutralise, or at least diminish, its power and status as a contextual factor.

Alternatively, however, it could be argued that refusal, or perhaps reluctance, to acknowledge gender and its linkage to merit or worthiness as a basis for constructing the role of principal of a rural school is an error of judgement. Put another way, Carol appears to reduce the knowledge and resources available to assist her to engage in the processes of negotiation and navigation in a complex context. As Clarke and Stevens (2006, p.14) argue,

a rural community can be seen as a spatial realm that is imbued with particular understandings of behavioural appropriateness and cultural expectations…[making] it especially difficult for women taking up the principalship in rural/remote schools because of a male-dominated ethos operating in these environments.

The experiences of Sarah and Carol in framing into the role of a rural principal, and its implications for how the role of principal is constructed, reveal that the period of commencement in a country location, and particularly one with a small population, can be a marginalising experience. Bell hooks in Soja (1996) locates power and utility with marginalisation, as well as seeing it as a source of nourishment. This particular aspect of hooks’ thinking, I believe, has potential to help reconceptualise how constructing the role of principal in a rural context that is hostile, or at least guarded in its acceptance of the person appointed into the role, might occur. In other words, there seems to be an opening here to use processes of marginalisation pro-actively, as a way of moving beyond marginality which is imposed to “marginality that one chooses as a site of resistance, as location of openness and possibility”, to paraphrase and then quote hooks (1990). Or in Soja’s (1996, p.98) summary of hooks’ treatise on marginalisation, “marginality reconceptualizes the problematic of subjection by deconstructing and disordering both margin and center...(and) new spaces of opportunity and action are created…”. In practical terms as it might apply to constructing the role of principal of a rural school, “being on the geographical and other margins creates opportunities...” (Moriarty, Danaher & Danaher, 2003, p.135).
The three males interviewed emphasise different things from the females. Principally, none reports the entry process as being contested or hostile. Perhaps one reason for this is that, in rural areas, there is a greater unspoken yet very real acceptance that it is more usual for men to be principals than women. This accords with consistent documented commentary about country communities frequently being patriarchally oriented and, because of this, providing a fertile context for stereotyping to persist (Wallin, 2005). The Australian Bureau of Statistics in its 1998 census report recorded that 69% of teachers were female but only one third of school principals were female. This pattern is not unique to Australia according to Collard (2003). Referring to work done by Ozga (1993) in England and Reynolds (1995) in Canada, Collard (2003, p.37) observes that, similar to Australia, schools are places where “men manage and women teach”.

Male principals interviewed seem to have to face a less critical and less multilayered context in which to think about and commence constructing their roles of rural principal. They appear not to have so much of the expressive and contrary interpersonal aspects to deal with at the outset of establishing themselves as school leaders, as do the female leaders in this study. It could be argued that this parallels in some ways what women experience in domestic arrangements where there are children to care for and both parents want to follow their career pathways ‘unencumbered’, so to speak. As Alston (2005, p.153) has also argued, “[w]omen who work must therefore fit this around their central mothering role [and], [a]s a consequence, woman’s interaction with the marketplace is viewed as secondary…”. Applying this observation to schools Collard (2003, p.38), when commenting on research findings on principals and gender, observed that females may be “restricted to roles in schools that are compatible with their other life-roles as wives and nurturers”.

Bob’s priority concern in starting the process of constructing his role was to work out how he would arrange all of the things he thought a principal should do so that he could devote his main emphasis to working directly with students. Pedagogy and care appear to be the lenses through which he works to construct his principalship. Harris (2005, p.83), in an overview of school leadership, would likely define Bob’s focus as instructional leadership — “actions that are directly related to teaching and learning …[and] which invests in capacity building by developing social and academic capital for students and intellectual and professional capital for teachers”. While Bob
recognises that there are other dimensions that play a role in how he constructs his role of principal of a rural primary school, positioning what he understands to be the learning and support needs and interests of children at the centre of his thinking and doing, seems to ground all of the other aspects of constructing the role. In other words, children’s learning determines the key characteristics of the mould and the methods that he uses to construct the role of principal.

Contrasted with Bob’s focus on the needs of others — students — Ivan’s framing into the role of rural principal seems to be connected to using the position to satisfy a cluster of personal and professional goals before retiring. Achievements, and recognition of them by others, appear to be significant in shaping how Ivan initially frames the construction of his understandings of the principal’s role of a secondary rural school. Collard’s (2003, p.37) analysis of “the relationships between the perceptions and beliefs of principals, their gender and other contextual factors” indicates that “men were somewhat more aligned to instrumental and technical curriculum goals, and women were more oriented toward personal–developmental objectives” (p.42). In Ivan’s situation there appears to be a blend of both instrumental and personal dimensions active in shaping how he constructs the role. The instrumental more or less equates to means and the personal to ends. As Ivan’s interview record shows, his application and subsequent appointment to Grantham were seen by him as the last chance he would have to finish his career with the state department as a principal of a rural school.

Geoff’s framing into constructing the role of principal of a rural school is apparently facilitated by the longevity of his time as an educator in rural places and by the fact that his appointment to Coles is an accomplishment of personal and professional choice. In what appears to be deterministic in relation to setting the parameters of how Geoff engages in constructing his role, the reported framing experiences of his appointment bring into the foreground the issue of establishing and then continuously monitoring availability and visibility in the community.

Rural and remote contexts, while providing many unique and challenging opportunities for principals both professionally and personally, are also inherently highly complex. This is primarily because small and thin-density populations frequently ascribe significant value to informal relationships and deep appreciation of local knowledge.
For school leaders (and others, like teachers), small communities can accentuate visibility and lack of anonymity, and frequently the short-term nature of appointments. These contextual and profile factors require knowledgeable and skilful negotiating and navigating, to ensure that capacities needed to be an effective constructor and manager of schooling, like being able to read and manage the micro-politics of a context ‘objectively and fairly’, are retained. Put another way, disregarding what one does or says as a principal in a small rural community may provide an excess of opportunities whereby interpretations of behaviours and talk can be used to generate views and understandings of incapacity to lead and manage a school. This is a risk which Geoff is apparently aware of and therefore builds into his approaches. There is also the issue of another kind of risk — in essence a mirror of the one outlined — where unavailability and reluctance by a principal to engage with the local community provides space for stories and views to be formed and promulgated in the absence, rather than the abundance, of information. Hence the importance of balancing the dynamics of visibility with anonymity in relation to framing into the role of rural principal. As Clarke and Stevens (2006, p.17) observe, “(o)ne thing that is difficult to manage in a small community…. is that you are always visible to the kids and they can’t differentiate between your private and professional life”. This observation may also apply to some of the adults in small rural communities.

**Vision and learning**

The *vision and learning* text organiser essentially flows on from the *framing into the role* organiser. It is a blend of two of the content domains used in the design of the semi-structured interview schedule, namely learning and visioning. The components of the learning content domain include: curriculum, teaching, assessment, student relationships, and school ethos. The visioning content domain was intended to provide opportunity for participants to focus on ‘big picture’ issues and directions, to raise matters that have a relatively long time horizon, and to explore issues associated with balancing the specificity of present concerns with more provisional and tentative aspects of dealing with the future.

For Carol, what appears to be relevant in terms of the relationship between how she constructs her role as a principal of a rural school and learning and visioning, is that the organiser provides a vehicle for her to demonstrate that she has the capabilities necessary
for the position. The vision she has for the school is focussed on sections of it like the middle school or the secondary methodology, rather than at whole-of-organisation level. Any sense of vision for the whole school seems to be a matter of extrapolating that change in one section of it may produce an enhancement of the overall school.

Confronting long-established staff routines and practices, which Carol believes are inhibiting the growth of an ethos in the school that is conducive to questioning and changing teaching practices, is another means that Carol seems to use to construct her role. The confrontation or challenging of traditions is done in an ‘internal to the school public only way’ — in other words, at regular staff meetings and in meetings of faculty groups where her behaviour is visible to all present, and meaning and motive is able to be attributed to it by individuals and groups in the presence of other individuals and groups. There is a sense then that Carol uses ‘routine meetings’ to disturb the status quo with what appears to be the intention of creating conditions that she believes are needed to construct her understandings of the role of principal of a rural school.

As well as doing some things apparently intended to ‘nudge people off their balance’ in relation to learning and visioning and constructing the role of principal, Carol allocates some of her time to teaching in the secondary year levels of the school, the area of which she is most critical. This she claims she does because it provides her with opportunities to accomplish at least two things: firstly, to demonstrate that as a primary trained teacher, she can teach secondary subjects and secondary students; secondly, to exemplify the kind of pedagogy that she believes needs to become common place in the secondary section of the school in order to improve student’s learning.

In somewhat of a contrast to Carol, Bob’s approach to constructing the role of principal in terms of learning and vision, is clustered around a set of values based in part on his previous experience of working in a school that had a strong focus on power, derived from particular experiences and views of social justice. The vision for the school that Bob appears to create from these values and for how he constructs his leadership is that students, their learning and their care needs must permeate, and indeed embrace, all that happens in the school.
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The priority Bob assigns to learning and students means that the vector through which the construction of a principal’s role often occurs — administration — is relegated or assigned to a subordinate position in the hierarchy of ‘things that principals should do to show that they are real principals’. For Bob, how the administrative responsibilities of a principal are translated into day-to-day practice should always result in student learning and care being central to all decision making. Put another way, it seems as though Bob uses the administrative components of the role of principal to demarcate and accentuate how he believes the school should function and, by association, how he as principal should also function.

For Ivan, vision and learning, as they apply to his understandings of how he constructs the role of a rural principal, appear to be embodied or represented by works going on in and associated with the school, rather than by an explicitly articulated set of statements. In other words, for Ivan, projects are tangible manifestations of vision and the priority assigned to learning. As well, in relation to learning and vision, he appears to construct his role by oscillating between the future, the present and by looking back into the history of the school and its achievements. Timelines, timescales and time as a contextual variable also appear to be active constituents in Ivan’s approaches to role construction. He seems to use these as a means to suspend or blank out the reality of the present and imagine what might be, and then find and assign resources to achieve some or all of the outcomes of his thinking.

In addition to project-based ways of constructing the role of a principal in relation to learning and vision, Ivan seems to place substantial emphasis on student results and how they compare with state-wide standards. While it would be an over-simplification to claim that for Ivan what really matters in terms of learning are results, it seem reasonable to assert that student results do determine important aspects of how Ivan approaches the task of role construction. Ivan profiles the school into the community and the wider district by focussing on the benefits of its size — big enough to offer subject diversity, small enough to provide individual care for students — and brands these distinguishing qualities as ones optimally positioned to maximise student achievements. As well as a stated concern for standards in Year 12 especially — ‘the year which really counts’ — Ivan also appears to be open to and constantly looking for, new learning opportunities for students that might result in one or more of them gaining employment locally. In this
way, some of Ivan’s role construction is influenced by vocational and entrepreneurial claims and particular understandings of secondary education.

Teachers appear to be integral to how Ivan constructs his role in relation to learning because he sees them as having the most direct and frequent contact with students. Consequently, Ivan meets with them regularly and essentially holds them accountable for the performance of each student in their classes against state-wide benchmarks. Ivan adopts what seems like a non-negotiable position on students’ results data — it is there to be used not ignored. The results data provide Ivan with a professional rationale through which to construct his role. It could be argued that, in identifying student performance as one of the means for constructing his role, Ivan is using an ‘uncontestable’ resource because of its broadly recognised legitimacy in terms of progressing both student and teacher achievement and well being.

Sarah’s priorities in terms of learning and vision and how she constructs her role as a rural principal, appear to be a blend of something very specific to her context and location and something which seems to be shared by each of the principals interviewed. In relation to the former I am referring to the viability and survival of the school; in relation to the latter, I am referring to students and their learning.

Sarah’s vision for Milton could be described as a composite of necessity and idealism. She appears to be acutely aware that if enrolments drop pressure will build either to close the school or reduce the year levels of education. If either occurred during her tenure, one gains the distinct impression that Sarah would consider herself as having failed as a rural principal, and so would the community. Consequently, doing things that she believes will contribute towards maintaining — even enhancing, in her more optimistic periods — the viability of Milton appear to be consistently in the foreground of how Sarah constructs her role.

Sarah’s very recent promotion out of the classroom is the basis of her claiming that students and their learning needs are always central to her thinking and doing. She uses this to underpin her focus on sustaining the school’s viability, and there are similarities here to Ivan’s marketing of Grantham as a school which delivers high quality learning opportunities in a small and supportive environment. In short, a virtue is made of
necessity, albeit with variations to allow for the differences in contexts and approaches to constructing the role of rural principal.

For Geoff, the role of vision and learning and how he constructs his role as a rural principal explicitly embraces the whole school, and apparently arises from the perspective of seeing himself as a servant of the learners. These characteristics seem to imbue some of Geoff’s orientations to his role construction in terms of it being like an adventure or a journey of discovery, and particularly in relation to ensuring that all students have opportunities to experience success. Additionally, Geoff appears to believe that the necessity to have a focus on vision and learning requires him to take the composite roles of interpreter, balancer and blender of local needs and possibilities with the wider and more global concerns of being an educational leader in a small rural community.

There appear to be three contributions arising from Geoff’s vision and learning dimension of constructing the role of principal. Firstly, it seems reasonable to claim that vision and learning engender a sense of optimism in relation to how Geoff sets about constructing the role. Secondly, the optimism is part of what he appears to draw upon to engage staff in processes of reflecting on their teaching, and especially the extent to which it is likely to lead to each student experiencing some success through their schooling. Thirdly, learning and vision seem to serve as a means of keeping Geoff’s focus on student needs, which in turn appear to feedback into sustaining his primary orientation to the role, that being one of service.

Discussion
From the analysis of the second interview text organiser, vision and learning, six understandings have been derived about how the principals of rural schools interviewed for this research construct their roles. They are: establishing credibility; values formation and values declaration; asserting the priority needs of students; projects, publicity and perceptions; school survival and sustainability; and interpreting, blending and balancing perceived learning and support needs with what it is possible to deliver. Rendering these to one or two words, they become: credibility, values, students first, actions, school survival, and ‘right mix’.
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Three of the understandings which emerge from the vision and learning organiser are somewhat similar to those from an analysis of framing into the role. They are: credibility and merit; students and students’ learning first; and ‘right mix’ and balance. In a way this is not surprising given that the semi-structured interview methodology used for this research incorporated opportunities for participants to reflect upon their verbatim transcripts and edit them. On the other hand, it could also be that the similarity is not surprising because it is to be expected that the principalship of schools, virtually by definition of the role even when considered quite broadly, is of itself likely to give rise to certain kinds of things and issues that are more likely than others to re-occur. For the purposes of discussion at this stage in the unfolding of the research findings, the ‘partial repetition’ of understandings is interesting in relation to how principals construct their roles in rural contexts in terms of what elements are beginning to gather momentum and could be said to be ‘feeding off’ as well as reinforcing others.

‘Credibility and merit’ can be seen in Carol’s account of constructing the role of principal and builds upon her framing into the role, where her assessment of her most immediate position prior to taking up her new appointment presumably caused her to adopt a ‘I have to prove something’ stance. Vision and learning then appears to provide her with another forum to build out her goal (un-stated, but implied from the transcript) of demonstrating that she is able to be the principal of a school that comprises both primary and secondary year levels. Having said this, it seems also to be the case that the matter of ‘credibility and merit’ could apply to Ivan as well, whose framing into the role appeared to be at least in part skewed towards demonstrating capability, but instead of situating this within himself, he projects it outwards into projects and activities intended to show that ‘good things were happening’. Perhaps what is evident in relation to the contrast between Carol and Ivan is different manifestations of what MacGilchrist, Myers and Reed (2004, p.122) call contextual intelligence — “the capacity to read, understand and interpret ... dimensions of the environment in which a school functions”.

There is a sense in which assigning the learning needs and interests of students foremost priority, in terms of constructing the role of principal in relation to the learning and vision organiser, should come as ‘no surprise’, as ‘natural’ and ‘expected’. Put another way, what else should assume a higher priority for a school than a focus on learning and vision? Of interest here is that although each of the principals in terms of learning and
vision include students and student issues in the mix of inputs and processes they use to construct their role, the extent to which these occur, and perhaps more significantly, the vehicles or means that are articulated by the respondents to facilitate role construction for student benefit, are diverse. For Carol, they are seeking out opportunities to re-cast the mould that has prescribed what constitutes appropriate secondary education and middle schooling; for Bob, it is a set of values based upon a particular interpretation of social justice and power; for Ivan, it is projects to profile the school and the use of external performance data to urge teachers to raise student achievements; for Sarah, it is working to keep the school viable; and for Geoff, it is striking the right balance for each student and a wish that he could take all of the students on an exploration of learning.

What might this diversity referred to in the preceding paragraph be indicative of in relation to constructing the role of principal of a rural school? The literature on place-based education may provide some insights here, even though it is more often associated with pedagogy than matters of leadership. It has been said (Gruenewald, 2003a, pp.3 & 4) that “place-based education lacks a specific theoretical tradition, though this is partly a matter of naming”, and “place based education has developed an ecological and rural emphasis that is often insulated from the cultural conflicts inherent in dominant …culture”. Notwithstanding both of these comments, the idea of place has particular relevance to rural contexts and to those who endeavour to live and work there, such as principals of rural schools. As Gruenewald (2003a, p.3) also asserts, “(p)lace…. foregrounds a narrative of local and regional politics that is attuned to the particularities of where people actually live, and that is connected to global development trends that impact local places”.

Significantly, in relation to context and its potential and possible contributions to how principals of rural schools might construct their roles, “places make us: As occupants of particular places with particular attributes, our identity and our possibilities are shaped…. places teach us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p.621). Put another way, place is a potentially rich source of knowledge, a primary shaping and contributing factor of the contexts in which principals of rural schools construct their roles. As well, linking place with the question of how principals in rural locations construct their roles has the potential to foreground the unique aspects of locations — what is commonly known and believed to distinguish
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one location from another — as well as aspects that may be more widely held. To borrow from and paraphrase Greuenewald (2003a), one of the more remarkable things about thinking about place and leadership is that it challenges and presses against discourses about leadership that trend towards standardisation. In other words, focussing through the lens of place on how the construction of the role of a rural principal occurs could help to open up potentially productive new insights to counter to ‘one size fits all’ orientations.

**Leading and Organising**

This section deals with the two constructs of leading and organising. They appear as separate entities in the documentary record to enable the distinctive contributions of each, as articulated by the interviewees to be profiled individually. However, they have been combined here into one text organiser for the purpose of analysis because they are each indispensable elements of organisations which “are distinct from other sorts of collectives in that they are articulated and formalised” (Shafritz, 2005, p.ix).

Carol appears to construct her role in terms of leading by reflecting upon educational leaders she has worked with, and then selecting from their styles and approaches those features which she values. Her selections seem to be informed by reference to analogies of the travails of leaders, and a working definition of leadership which includes words such as vision, credibility, inspire and journey. In making the selections from other leaders she has admired, and using them to help her compose how she constructs her role, Carol seems to give substantial emphasis to thinking about how others perceive her and how she perceives herself as a leader.

For Carol, organising is somewhat of a contrast to the apparent tentativeness that accompanies the construct of leading, and appears to provide opportunity for Carol to deal confidently with some of the ‘how’ aspects of rural principalship. For Carol, organising is getting things done and ensuring there are sufficient resources of the right kinds available to be allocated to tasks. Organising is action, is doing, and is determining the most likely ways of ensuring that staff will work to achieve what has to be achieved. Carol says that she uses colleagues in her school district for sounding out ideas and approaches about running the school. If Carol senses that there is reluctance amongst staff or governing council members to become involved in discussing or progressing issues or initiatives that she believes are important, she contrives situations...
to bring people into contact and communication with others. Once having done this however, if Carol detects that discussions are becoming ‘bogged down’ or she thinks that the goal she has in mind is being thwarted, Carol adopts a directive organisational style on proceedings. A prominent view that Carol appears to have about organising is that much time can be wasted in discussions which are tangential to the ‘main agenda’. Keeping things ‘on track’ and people ‘on task’ are seen by Carol as significant aspects of her role as principal.

Bob appears to make a clear distinction between leading and organising: the former focuses on people, the latter on things. Having made such an apparently ‘hard line’ distinction, Bob recognises that the organisational dimensions of schools are essential to facilitating the achievement of their primary purpose — education and care for children. In the contest for a principal’s attention and allocation of time, assuming for the purposes of this section of analysis that it is essentially a contest between leadership matters and organisational matters, for Bob leadership usually takes priority. This seems to occur because of the basic understanding Bob has of the two elements of a principal’s role — that people (leadership) take precedence over processes (organising).

Connecting with people in the school and the school community is something that Bob says is fundamental to how he constructs his role as a principal of a rural school. The term ‘connecting’ is an interesting one when thinking about how principals construct their roles, coming as it does in a consideration of leading and organising, two of the terms that are probably the most frequently used when discussing the role and operations of formal organisations like schools. Connecting has a sense of reaching out about it, of joining together, of emphasising more of a human than a bureaucratic orientation. For Bob, the term connecting seems to be a vehicle or a means for conveying what he would probably call genuineness or credibility in relation to his motives for being a principal. This seems to relate back to his reluctance, as reported earlier, to leave his role as a teacher and then as a counsellor to pursue principalship. Is it perhaps that by focussing on connection as a substantial emphasis of his approach to leading and organising, Bob is able to retain for his own sense of centeredness, connection to roles that he fundamentally believes are more authentic, more ‘real’, more important than being a principal?
Bob also has images of leading and managing that apparently shape how he constructs his role. For leading, he uses the image of a lighthouse; for organising he refers to a thermometer and, in addition, relies on a few other members of his staff to take readings for him about what is happening or not happening or needs to happen in the school and community, and why. From an organising perspective, matching and managing — possibly more accurately described as juggling — the resources available to the school with the role expectations of it derived from the staff, the parents and the community, the students and the department, is something that Bob sees as being germane to how he constructs his role.

Like Bob, Ivan seems to have distinctive, though related, understandings about what constitutes leading and what constitutes organising. From the record of the interview with Ivan, it appears that he sees leading as something that he has to do as a principal and that chief among its purposes is to inspire and generate an ethos, presumably so that his vision of ‘good education’ can be realised. Like Bob as well, Ivan refers to imagery and contexts outside of education to try to capture the essence of what underpins his views of education. Specifically, Ivan calls it the fish philosophy, named after a fish market where people decided to turn something routine — fish mongering — into something special. It seems as though Ivan uses the idea as a means to engage staff in thinking about how they can turn their teaching from ‘ordinary and routine’ into ‘special and unique’. In addition to the fish market as a source of ideas for leading, Ivan also approaches leading the school and how he constructs his role in terms of floating ideas about what changes might be worth considering. He seems to accept that such an approach to constructing his role has a ‘hit and miss’ character about it but appears to fold this into his overall understandings about what leading a school comprises.

In relation to organising, it seems as though Ivan views it as being essentially a means to an end and, paradoxically given one overall impression from his interview that principalship is about taking and being in control, not something on which a principal can exercise a lot of influence and change. Having made this claim, it could also be argued from Ivan’s interview record that the organising dimensions of his role seem to provide him with the greatest scope to create his brand of the role of a rural principal. This assertion is made because Ivan sees a close nexus between the financial resources of the school and the things he wants to organise, here meaning to plan for and to do.
Put another way, Ivan uses ideas or projects linked with money as a platform from which to profile and progress his understandings of how the role of a rural principal is constructed and made evident to others.

Sarah’s situation in relation to learning and organising and constructing the role of rural principal is, as referred to previously, framed by the recency of her appointment as a principal. As Sarah appears to see things, she has nothing to lose in terms of leadership; what could also be said is that she has potentially a lot to gain through how she engages in constructing her understanding of the role. And, sitting inside this potential gain is also a potential loss, in a manner of speaking — the loss of future opportunities if others judge as inadequate what it is she has done during her albeit limited tenure. An apparently significant shaping influence on how Sarah approaches leading and leadership of the school was acquired from a colleague in another school. When Sarah was discussing her role with the colleague, the person told Sarah that when you are the leader, it is always your turn. This ‘wisdom from the work-face’ seems to function like a ‘bottom line’ expectation that Sarah imposes on herself, which in turn influences how she creates opportunities for staff to participate in decision-making and progress of school initiatives.

In terms of organising, for Sarah it is ‘one thing at a time as they come’. She refers, perhaps it could be said also defers, to her time as a teacher to focus her thinking on constructing her role as a rural principal through this organiser. This experience, as an informer of practice in the school’s most senior position, appears to means that Sarah is disposed to involving other staff in decision-making. As well, she seems to use networks of what she evaluates to be expertise to inform and help determine the final position response she will take on a matter.

Geoff, like Bob, seems to explicitly place people as central to constructing his role as a rural principal through the construct of leading. However, for Geoff the focus is not only on the relationship he has with them but also on challenging them to think broadly and constructively about their teaching. The values of the school and his personal values, Geoff claims to be instrumental in how he develops his role as a leader. The value — or is it more accurately termed, goal? — that Geoff says shapes his basic approach to leading the school is that all students and all teachers should experience
success. Presumably by taking such a clear values stand here, it is reasonable to extrapolate that Geoff would see that he also should experience success as a principal, which in turn, it could be argued, would contribute towards growing a success context or ethos for the school and the community.

Organising, while more of a day-to-day concern, Geoff sees as essential so that the actual running of the school occurs efficiently and effectively. One of the ways that Geoff seems to construct his role through organising is via a combination of mobility and visibility. Geoff says he spends a significant amount of his time moving around the school, visiting classrooms, speaking with teachers, familiarising himself with individual students. In addition, Geoff says that he uses a series of committees to deal with various organisational aspects of his overall responsibilities as a principal. He appears to use a ‘waxing and waning’ relationship style with the committees, which seems to provide him with scope to vary his level of engagement with them from very close and detailed to quite distant and ‘hands off’. To assist him with understanding what was going on and why during the early stages of his time at Coles, Geoff adopted a personality-traits-linked-to-colours approach to ‘making sense of messages’ and believes that the strategy has been important in terms of how he constructs his role as a rural principal (Herrmann, 2001).

Discussion

From the analysis of leading and organising, there seem to be four contributions to understanding how principals of rural schools construct their roles. They are: by referencing mentors and endeavouring to emulate role models; by creating and using images and metaphors; by developing and making connections with others; and by initiating projects and events. In shortened form they can be represented as: exemplars, pictures, linking and projects.

Lakomski (in Harris 2005, p.74) “argues that leadership as traditionally conceived is of little help in explaining and engineering change in complex organisations”, of which schools are an example. While I agree with this, I also hold a view that traditional conceptions of leadership and organisation are of limited assistance in understanding how leaders of complex organisations construct their roles. West (2003) in Harris (2005) has articulated a number of phases which have accompanied the growth and
development of the plethora of models and views of leadership—Harris (2005, p.76) claims that “there are 350 definitions of leadership” — including one phase described as “increasing the focus on what it is that leaders actually do” (p.77). It is my contention, using West’s phases approach to leadership development, that the ‘doing’ dimension of leading and organising in relation to rural contexts and principals of rural schools is under-investigated, especially in terms of how the ‘doing’ occurs.

From the interview records, it might be claimed there is a major gap or deficiency in what has been recorded and reported, namely an absence or quite infrequent use by the participants of much of the terminology and jargon often associated with leading and organising. This situation is considered, however, to be a strength for the purposes of this research because the aim is to get beneath and move beyond the taken-for-granted and expected terminology usage and communications of principals into how they actualise what it is they say they do in their roles. To illustrate from the field of music performance, the distinction is between what has to be done in order to play a violin, the technical, and translating the technical to produce sound that is widely recognised as music. Writing about leadership in and for universities, Senge (2000, p.1) has argued that there is a disconnect between theory and practice which is “sending young people into the world with heads full of ideas and ‘answers’ but little experience in producing more effective action”. This is another way of illustrating the primary focus of this research, and this section of it in particular, to provide some insights that may help to close the gap between the ‘ingredients’ of leadership and the more authentic construction of it in contexts.

A widely distributed practice of school leaders is that they draw on the experiences of others to inform how to do something in another context at another time (Ospina et al, 2002; Spillane, et al 2003; Crowther, et al 2006). In making this claim, caution needs to be exercised because of the continuing predominance of male leadership of education (Hall, 1997; Blackmore 1998) and the gendered differentiation of role models and experiences that may be used by others. In terms of how constructing the role of a rural principal occurs, it seems as though role models or exemplars of good practice function as a type of capacity-builder for the individual. Put another way, reflecting on role models and how they might function in a particular context appears to provide an individual with a ‘road tested’ range of ways of leading and organising. There is then a
form of “co-production” (Ospina et al., 2002, p.2) of how leading and organising occurs, where one practitioner utilises the resources of another to create role responses.

The second understanding about how principals of rural schools construct their roles in relation to leading and organising is by using pictures and images to generate visual representations to characterise how they see their leading and organising occurring. The visuals appear to facilitate the translation into action of what is believed needs to happen. The visuals also seem to be a way for an individual to portray the essence of their leading and organising understandings to others and to ‘signal’ how they may operationalise them. Another related way of thinking about how principals construct their role through pictures and images is in terms of them being items of the cultural capital of the individual and of the contexts in which they function. Spillane et al (2003, p.3, emphasis in original) describes cultural capital as “acquired ways of being and doing, enduring interactive styles that are of value in particular contexts… and [which] manifests itself in the stylistic form of the interaction [context]”.

The third leading and organising construct for understanding about how principals construct their role is ‘linking’. The term, although it may have quite a mechanical overtone, has been chosen over what might be seen as a softer, more organic word like ‘networking’ for two reasons. The first is that the word ‘linking’ has a dimension of intentionality associated with it; it conveys action to achieve an objective. Secondly, ‘linking’ has also been chosen to encapsulate how principals say they construct their role in relation to leading and organising, because it also suggests connection but is more directional than this term. ‘Linking’ suggests that the role of a principal cannot be constructed in isolation from others, and indeed there is no substance to the claim of being a principal without a sense of connection with others, and especially students and teachers. Quoting and then paraphrasing Spillane et al (2003, p.12) “it is through…seemingly mundane interactions [like linking] that potential [and actual] leaders enact forms of capital and followers [those ‘joined’ through linking]” contribute to how construction of the role of principal occurs.

The fourth understanding about how principals of rural schools construct their roles in terms of leading and organising is ‘projects’. For the purposes of this discussion, projects are entities that either convey, or have the potential to convey, messages of various kinds.
They include the articulation of other futures unfolding than the status quo, the ‘promise’ of action taking place, and signalling that some things either have acquired or are likely to acquire a higher profile and status than others. Each of these messages can disturb and disrupt contexts as well as open new opportunities and create a sense of energy and enlivening. From the perspective of how roles are constructed, projects can be a platform or a vector for principals. They can also be a vehicle for negotiating and traversing between the different contexts, the different spaces, in and through which they go about their day-to-day work of role construction. Put another way, projects are a means for principals to build and to demonstrate leadership across boundaries and between and with various groups and agencies (Edinger & Murphy, 1995). Projects also appear to be a way for a principal to construct her or his role essentially on a ‘rural is not synonymous with deficit’ basis. As extrapolated from Moriarty, Danaher and Danaher (2003, p.135), it is important for rural principals to use opportunities such as those which can be occasioned by projects, “to challenge the orthodoxy that conceives of educational experience in non-metropolitan areas in deficit terms”.

**Community**

Carol’s understanding, interpreting and working with the community of the Kent school as she constructs her role as principal, seems to be based upon a complex dynamic of engagement with the community, tempered by varying degrees of separation and distancing. A major factor in how Carol constructs her role as a rural principal is her perception and feeling of a “lack of anonymity”. Visibility and apparent ready access to her professional and personal spaces — her house is on the boundary of the school — each seem to feed into this perception. To bring a pro-active dimension to the ‘nowhere to hide’ context in relation to community, Carol says she does two things which are integral to how she constructs her role as a rural principal.

Firstly, Carol seeks out opportunities within the community for the community to see and get to know her as a person as well as knowing her as the principal of the school. To this end, Carol joined the local town development group soon after arriving at the school. Carol appears to be sensitive about the community thinking that she is just the principal of the school because that is her job, rather than she is principal of the school because she wants to be part of the community. Carol is also aware that stories about her as a principal and a private citizen are made up, told and circulated throughout the
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community. By locating herself in community-legitimated contexts and forums, Carol believes she has some degree of influence over the substance of the stories, which in turn may have some consequences for how she constructs her role.

Secondly, Carol ensures that events that have been traditionally based in the community, like Remembrance Day celebrations, are conducted within the confines of the school. By doing this, and a string of other types of education-related events like Bookweek which the school runs that provide a reason, an incentive or an excuse for community to come into the school, Carol creates opportunities that appear to feed into how she constructs her role as a principal, and opportunities for the dissemination of some of the values she wants the wider community to know that she holds. As well, bringing community into the school on her ‘patch’ seems to contribute to Carol’s self esteem building, which in turn appears to have some enabling flow-on effects for engaging with other facets of her role construction, like decision making.

For Bob, who quite frequently throughout the interview talked about his commitment to the community, and indeed his comfortableness at being a member of it, one major event dominates his understanding and approach to community and the construction of his role as principal. A major fire which destroyed most of the historic building, records and memorabilia of the Wickes school appears to have had a seminal impact on his belief that he is in the place he needs to be at this particular time of his life. The fire, which was watched by several generations of former students as it ‘consumed their lives as children’, paradoxically perhaps has had a number of positive impacts on how Bob constructs his role as principal in terms of community. Three seem to be especially pertinent here.

Firstly, destruction of much of the school suddenly thrust it into state-wide prominence, albeit for a limited time, as media rushed to film and report the event and speculate on causes and impacts. Consequently, Bob was provided with a ‘ready made’, although totally unexpected and unsolicited, public platform that enabled him to share how he saw the event impacting on his students, his staff, his community and what he would be doing about it. Secondly, the destruction caused by the fire acted as a kind of catalyst and release mechanism for many town residents who had attended the school when a child, to tell their stories about being a pupil at the school and what it had meant to
them. These stories, even allowing for the factoring in of some ‘rose coloured glasses’ effects, appear to have emboldened Bob’s resolve to be a principal, given his doubts about his suitability for the role and the fact that it might take him away from contact with students. In relation to community and how he constructs his role, the community in this instance appears to act as an enhancer of his confidence and capacities for the role.

A third positive impact of the fire and Bob’s construction of his role in terms of community seems to be that opportunities that were formerly not there were opened for his engagement with other civic leaders like the town mayor. As well, the fire presented opportunities for Bob to negotiate the replacement of destroyed facilities and equipment by ones that were more aligned to the school’s philosophies of teaching and learning, and to argue for improved community-accessed assets like library services. In short then the fire, while a town tragedy on the one hand, seems to have provided Bob with a unique opportunity to both cast and re-cast himself in the construction of his role as principal in terms of community relations and engagement.

Ivan’s approach to how he constructs his role as principal of a rural school and community seems to focus around four things. The first of these could be described as his need for the community to be in no doubt that he is the principal of Grantham. Secondly, to ‘secure’ this understanding in the community, and especially with those members who have influence and the capacity to shape community attitudes and thinking, Ivan creates opportunities to engage with community both on ‘their turf and his’. Thirdly, Ivan’s understanding of community as it relates to his leadership context is that it not only presents problematic dynamics for him to work with and through, but it partly frames his orientation toward community as being a place where there are potential ‘traps’ for his young staff. This view seems to have a bearing on how he constructs his role as a principal, because on the one hand it causes him to have explicit behavioural expectations on his staff when in the community, and on the other it appears to contribute towards his projects creation — monuments? legacy? — view of the purpose of leadership.

Fourthly, how Ivan constructs his role in relation to community seems to be influenced — perhaps moderated — by a belief that as principal of a rural school he is under
constant surveillance. This in turn appears to be shaped by his belief that, taken as a whole, the community that sends their children to Grantham and supports it is quite conservative in outlook. This conservatism, according to Ivan, extends to views about principalship and gender that he finds perplexing to some extent, given that his predecessor was female, as will be his successor. The matters of conservatism and gender seem to impact on how he constructs his role in that he regularly makes time to go into traditional male-dominated community contexts such as the bar in the local hotel and meet with locals and talk about his work and other matters.

For Sarah, the community seems to be more of an oppositional or impeding factor than an enabling factor, in relation to how she constructs her role as a rural principal. Having made this observation, however, Sarah appears from her reporting to use the mainly deficit-oriented community context as an energy source for her work. Put another way, her reported experiences of *community*, which she had first as a teacher of a subject she felt most parents did not want in the school and later as a principal, seem to present her with a professional challenge to overcome rather than succumb to. The consequences of adopting this stance in terms of how Sarah undertakes constructing the role of principal seem to be threefold in kind.

Firstly, and as commented upon earlier, Sarah appears to apply herself to leadership tasks in an intense and focussed way and spends extended hours in the school working to resolve issues. This she couples with an ‘always available for parent enquiries’ approach to school principalship. Secondly, Sarah appears to be reticent about engaging deeply with the community in their spaces and places for fear that she, and indeed other staff who might do this, will see and hear things that she believes will impact negatively on her professionalism. This situation, it could be argued, feeds into Sarah’s construction of her role as a principal through the organiser of *community* in somewhat of a blinkered way. On the other hand, it could also be argued that, by avoiding the problematic community contexts that she believes exist, Sarah is optimising her role impact by not having to process observations and experiences made in ‘someone else’s territory’ that may have direct consequences for the one she is legally responsible for.

Thirdly, the majority interpretation Sarah has of the community and the apparently relentless pressure applied to have her become more ‘one of them’ by, for example,
living in the school house and attending Saturday sports matches and associated social functions, seems to act as motivator to do ‘more and better things’ for students. In other words, the pressure she experiences from the community and her response to it appear to translate into intensifying the emphasis Sarah places upon the pedagogical and student well-being aspects of her role construction.

There seem to be two main ways in which community as an organiser apply to Geoff and how he undertakes the construction of his role. The first could be described as a reciprocity of recognition and probably unspoken, and definitely unwritten, ‘compact’. By this I mean that for Geoff, one of the key strands to his approach to community and its influence on how he constructs his role, is to present himself as a person who values the community, wants to be a member and is prepared to express this in tangible ways like football coaching. An added dimension to the ‘compact’ is that Geoff articulates that one of his main tasks is to ensure that the school meets community needs and expectations.

The second way that community impacts on how Geoff constructs his role as principal is in terms of using it as a resource or as an entity to engage in dialogue through both in-person and written means, about issues that are beyond the local context but also have some impacts on it, or might have in the future. Climate change is a case in point, given the mainly primary industries economic base of the local economy. There appears to be a sense in which the community is both engaged with and taken into a ‘partnership’ in terms of an ongoing conversation focussed on the complex interactions between what is ‘going on’ more widely and more generally, and what might be or should be the localised educational response to them.

**Discussion**

There appear to be three contributions about how principals of rural schools construct their roles that can be derived from the analysis of the community interview text organiser. They are: living and dealing with a lack of anonymity and privacy and surveillance; creating opportunities, and using unexpected opportunities for engagement and utilising apparent oppositional community sentiments to catalyse and energise role creation. In shortened form to assist with discussion they are: panopticism, engagement,
and dynamics. Before proceeding further, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation for each of the terms that have been chosen to represent the longer statements.

‘Panopticism’ is a term taken from Foucault’s (1977) work on discipline and punishment and, as Ball (1990, p.31, emphasis added) says, it refers to the “all seeing eye” of a surveillance which is also a judgement, which does not even have to be looking to make one feel watched”. ‘Engagement’ is being used principally in the sense of working with and through community to produce something of either a material or a relational kind. ‘Dynamics’ is being used in the sense of forces, which can be moral as well as physical in nature, that act in any field and have effects and affects (Macquarie Dictionary, 1990).

For Carol and Sarah, the community organiser shows a continuation of a sense of tension and tenuousness in their relationships with their respective communities. Both of them seem to feel and experience, much more than is apparently the situation for the three male principals interviewed, a strong sense of having to prove themselves ‘fit for office’. For the male principals, no hint of this sense of having to prove oneself fit for the role of principal came through in any of the interviews (and in making this statement, the limitations of drawing emphatic conclusions from interviews need to be acknowledged). Rather, in relation to community, each of the male principals in different ways seemed to take initiative and engage directly with community and seek opportunities for implementing their understandings of principalship in a rural context, without thought to having to demonstrate or prove their worth.

This contrast is not intended to diminish the efforts recorded by each of the female principals to do things with and for the community as part of how they construct their roles; rather its purpose is to provide a fundamental point of difference between the male and the female principals as interviewed. Put another way, the male principals appear to assume that their approaches to being the leader of a school in a rural context will be accepted and recognised while the females seem to have to undertake a more nuanced and indirect form of role negotiation and role creation. Each of the contributions from the analysis of how principals say they construct their roles in terms of community accentuate the distinctions between the nature of the dynamics which the females appear to have to work with and by, and what is the situation for the males. In
short, the *community* interview text organiserforegrounds and highlights what appears to happen, what appears not to happen and what appears might happen, when female ‘outsiders’ or female ‘workers on a limited work permit’, as principals on specified contracts might be seen, enter into places and spaces that are of ‘others’ construction and ‘others’ histories and biographies.

The earlier discussion on the framing into the role organiser included quotations from various authors that support what appears to be the situation with female principals in rural contexts as presented in this section, and indicate that the general kind of ‘treatment’ is apparently widespread. However, there are several other observations that can be made using the three understandings of panopticism, dynamics and engagement that may add to knowledge of how principals of rural schools construct their roles. Before doing this, it is instructive to realise the fundamental significance of a rural community having a school — ‘its school; our school’. As Wallin (2005, p.136) says, “the rural school [is] a symbol of community unity, community survival, and community values”.

The functions of rural schools as described by Wallin, and endorsed and elaborated upon by others such as Halsey (2006), Green and Reid (2004), McSwan (2003), Wotherspoon (1998) and Higgins (1994), delineate and determine symbolic as well as real and practical signifiers of community that have to be retained, because to let these signifiers go or drift without controls or parameters around them, would be to contribute to the undermining and the demise of one’s place. As Theobold (1997), cited in Wotherspoon (1998, p.132), argues, “schools therefore contain potential ‘by attending to their place’ to build and restore healthy communities rather than leaving them as remnants of the onslaught of global forces”. If it is accepted that a principal has some role in maintaining, building and restoring community through a school, it may be argued that some ‘controls’ have to be placed on them to ensure that what they do, or do not do, does work toward achieving what a community aspires to, either in an articulated or unspoken way. In other words, for the community the continuance of ‘their place’ beyond the tenure of the present role incumbent is at stake here. Achieving this objective then means that the community requires processes for ‘managing and moderating’ what happens during a principal’s time in a particular community.
The three understandings of panopticism, engagement and dynamics may be thought of as three different kinds of processes for achieving community continuance.

‘Panopticism’, from the analysis of the interviews, seems to focus more directly and heavily on the two female principals in the sample than the three males. It has been argued that women principals of rural schools are frequently cast in a ‘no-win’ situation from two perspectives. Firstly, because ‘properly’ the leadership of a school should be the province of a male. Secondly, the ‘no-win’ tag applies because females bring into the professional domain of leadership the potential of domesticity playing too great a role in shaping what happens in a school, to students and, by implication, the community (Blackmore, 1998). However, it could also be argued that greater ‘panoptic attention’ is focussed on women because they are potentially more influential, and indeed more powerful, than males in terms of school leadership. Amongst other things, if this assessment is accepted, women may begin to expose some of the attitudes and practices that nurture a continuance of the belief that school leadership is ‘men’s business’.

The second understanding about how principals construct their role in terms of the community interview text organiser, ‘engagement’, appears to have overall pro-active connotations about it. This is the case for each of the five principals interviewed even though for Sarah, her engagement is mainly of a reactive kind in relation to her perceptions about community receptivity and support of her principalship. Another way of describing the set of situations would be to say that each of the principals explicitly enters into discussions with the community. This seems to occur issue by issue, context by context, or through the formal governance arrangements for rural public schooling, with the aim of achieving something tangible — such as a new school, a vocational program, conducting an established community event, or an ‘agreement’ to pursue some particular line of enquiry about future options for the school. Engagement, both planned and as opportunity presents, appears to provide space for emergence. This in turn ‘brings forth’ opportunity for discourse, which is one of the fundamental ways in which individuals and groups gain understandings about and influence — sometimes constrain — each other.

‘Dynamics’ as the third understanding is concerned with how principals use what they interpret to be predominantly oppositional community stances and behaviours as a
resource for bringing energy and an ‘edge’ to how they construct role. In other words, while the systemic rhetoric of public rural education would require principals to work in partnership with their communities, a piece of policy rhetoric especially open to multiple interpretations, the apparent day-to-day reality for some rural principals seems to be one of being in opposition to community, or perhaps in competition, rather than one of cooperation and collaboration. This state of affairs, however, appears to be used generatively, even though ideally principals would most likely prefer it if the contested and problematic nature of the context could be reduced.

Analysing community in terms of how rural principals construct their role gives prominence to the navigating and negotiating dimensions of the role, and the reactions within communities as they work with and make ‘sense’ of these dimensions. As Panelli (2001) concludes her research, referring to Harper (1989) and Wright (1992), “community is as much a notion of process as one of structure”, and “community may be continually made and remade whereby certain meanings and relations (eg gender) are sustained while others are challenged and possibly reshaped ...” (p.164).

**Learnings for the next leadership position**

For Carol, the learnings she would take into another leadership position may be described as a composite of ‘business as usual’, along with two caveats and an ‘anchor’. The ‘business as usual’ aspect of her thinking forward into another role appears from the interview record to have some degree of tentativeness about it, with space being left in her response for further modifications to leadership approaches and style, should they be required. This seems reasonable given that Carol’s tenure to date as principal has been ‘coloured and flavoured’ by numerous incidents that she experienced as acts of hostility toward her at both personal and professional levels.

The two caveats that Carol says would shape her approaches to another leadership position may be described as: striking a more productive balance between how others see her and how Carol sees herself, and distancing herself more from staff. The first caveat appears to have its genesis in some of the tensions she experienced when she confronted and dealt with the ‘blokey’ ethos generated by some long-standing members of staff. As well, the first caveat may also be grounded in how gender was understood and interpreted by Carol as a factor in how she constructed her role. The second caveat
appears to arise from Carol living and working in a context where the boundary between her personality as a private citizen and her personality as a professional is often blurred, and sometimes apparently non-existent. In addition to the two caveats, in her interview Carol was very clear about one thing that she would definitely repeat in another leadership position: building and maintaining strong collegial networks in the education district and amongst the local school cluster. This appears to be both a ‘lifeline’ and an ‘anchor’ at Kent and would continue to be so for her in another leadership role.

Bob’s focus on learnings from his present position for another leadership role seems to comprise a blend of people and processes. In relation to people, Bob attributes success as the leader of a school to the quality of the staff who work with the principal. In view of this, Bob says that one of the key learnings from his time as principal of Wickes for how he would construct his role as a leader in another context is, spend quality time developing staff and supporting their growth. Moving to another leadership role, Bob would take time to form a set of values that could become the focus of the school’s programs and directions. This learning essentially comes as ‘no surprise’ given that Bob referred on several occasions during his interview to the long association he had had with a set of social justice-based values and implications for education derived from them.

Placing student learning and care at the core of how he would construct his next leadership role is another learning that seems to be a priority for Bob. As for his ‘journey’ with values, this flows consistently from the text of Bob’s interview. Linked to the centrality of students’ learning and care as a learning for the future, Bob also seems to want to take into another leadership position the importance of having a strong sense of relationship with students and with the adults — teachers, parents, other members of family and community — who comprise a student’s ‘immediate world’ of people. Linked with this, there seems to be a learning that focuses on striving for, and maintaining, a sense of balance in managing the complexity of the dynamics which can be part and parcel of creating contexts where relationships play a key role in learning.

Ivan’s learnings for the next leadership position, from his experiences of constructing his role at Grantham, appear to focus around issues of gaining and utilising knowledge about a context and a resource during the early phase of an appointment. The context is
community and the resource is staff, although each can also be described as both context and resource. For analysis here, I have chosen to consider community and staff as context and resource, respectively.

In relation to community, Ivan seems to have an explicit purpose in mind, which is getting to know those who are influential so that their thinking about what should be done with and for the school can be ‘shaped’ by an incoming principal. Put another way, developing a community influenced power base would be one of the things Ivan would do at the start of another term as principal, in terms of how he constructed his role.

There appear to be three aspects to staff as a resource and learnings for another leadership position. Some of the learnings for Ivan seem to be associated with his time as a departmental staffing officer. There is a sense in which the experience of how Ivan constructed his role as principal of Grantham is ‘shadowed’ by a ‘bigger picture’. The first aspect of staff as a resource appears to focus on improving quality control for selection, which Ivan sees as a shared departmental and site level responsibility. The second aspect of staff as a resource is a subset of quality but, because of the emphasis placed on it by Ivan during the interview, it has been singled out for specific mention. Working to minimize, and desirably eliminate, the appointment to a rural school of staff who have personal issues that impact on their ability to be effective teachers, seems to be something that Ivan would carry forward into another leadership position as a result of what he has learnt from his time at Grantham. The third aspect of staff as a resource, partly accentuated by the implementation of school-based management, is understanding that staff are cost centres and consequently require close and effective management to ensure that a school remains solvent.

Sarah’s experience of how she constructs her role as principal of Milton appears to have produced six learnings for another leadership position. The first learning is that she would develop a plan of action for her next school rather than put things out in “dribs and drabs”. This learning is, in part, a result of Sarah being appointed to her current school at short notice and also in an acting capacity. In a real sense, her opportunities to develop a whole school plan have been limited. Secondly, Sarah stated in her interview that in her next position she would be more upfront about her vision and philosophy of
education. Thirdly, Sarah would continue a practice that she has highlighted in her current approach to constructing her role, one of maintaining close contact with students and a focus on establishing relationships with staff aimed at them developing “ownership” of the school and its programs.

Three other learnings from Sarah’s time as principal of Milton seem to cluster around her experiences of community. The fourth learning is that early in her next appointment as a principal she would find out what the local “protocols” and ‘ways of doing business’ are to hopefully reduce what she considered to be some of the dysfunctional and time wasting aspects of her current role. Fifthly, Sarah would ‘do what she could’ to be visible and have a presence in the local school community, even though this has been one of the personally and professionally more contentious aspects of how she has constructed her role at Milton. Finally, Sarah would take with her into another leadership position, a disposition towards it of the “glass is half-full”. In other words, it seems as though constructing the role of principal at Milton has reinforced for Sarah, or at least retained, a view that ‘the way to go’ is by having an orientation to leadership that is about building upon what you have rather than trying to compensate for what you do not have.

From Geoff’s account of how he constructs his role of principal of Coles, there appears to be one overall learning and that is, do things quicker. There appears, from the data Geoff produced, nothing else that he would change about his approaches to constructing another leadership role. The learning, do things quicker, Geoff said he would apply to three areas of constructing the role of rural principal that he believes are particularly important. The first of these is building credibility — he apparently would do, say and be things that community, staff and students would ‘read’ as ‘this is a credible principal’, more quickly in another role than he has at Coles. Secondly, Geoff would move more quickly than he had done at Coles to review the structures of a new school and how they impact on students and parents. Thirdly, Geoff would commence engaging with staff in what appears to be a deep and sustained way, earlier than he has done at Coles.
In addition to moving more quickly on what Geoff believes are vital areas of schools and the construction of leadership, Geoff stated that he would continue his passion about students and their learning into another role.

**Discussion**

Before identifying and discussing what each of the principals has learnt from constructing their role in their current school that they would use in another leadership position, a summary of the understandings from the previous four interview text organisers is presented, as a way of providing a focus for the final section of this Chapter.

The analysis of *framing into the role* revealed six understandings about how principals of rural schools apparently engage in constructing their roles. They are: responding to perceived gender based resistance; proving worthiness for the position; fulfilling professional and personal goals; assigning highest priority to student learning needs and interests; balancing public and personal privacy; and pacing change. Represented by a single word to try and capture the essence of each one, they are: *gender, merit, fulfilment, learning, balance, and pacing.*

The analysis of the second interview text organiser, *vision and learning*, produced six understandings about how the principals of rural schools say they construct their roles. They are: establishing credibility; values formation and values declaration; asserting the priority needs of students; projects, publicity and perceptions; school survival and sustainability; and, interpreting, blending and balancing perceived learning and support needs with what it is possible to deliver. Reducing these to one or two words, they are: *credibility, values, students first, actions, school survival, and ‘right mix’.*

From the analysis of *leading and organising* there seemed to be five contributions to understanding how principals of rural schools construct their roles. They are: by referencing mentors and endeavouring to emulate role models; through creating and using images and metaphors; by developing and making connections with others; by initiating projects and events; and, fostering staff attitudes conducive to progressing the school’s mission. In shortened form they are: *exemplars, pictures, linking, projects, and attitudes.*
In relation to the fourth interview text organiser, *community*, there appeared to be three contributions about how principals of rural schools construct their roles. They are: living and dealing with a lack of anonymity, privacy and surveillance; creating opportunities, and using unexpected opportunities for engagement; and, utilising apparent oppositional community sentiments to catalyse and energise role creation. In shortened form they are: *panopticism, engagement, and dynamics*.

The *learnings for the next leadership position* interview text organiser has appeared to generate more diverse understandings about how rural principals construct their roles than the other organisers. This is not surprising for several reasons. Firstly, the questioning for this aspect of my research came near the end of each interview, and therefore was an opportunity for interviewees to review and summarise what they had recorded to that point. Secondly, the contexts of each of the schools, while all rural in terms of the criteria established for sampling, are quite diverse in and of themselves. Thirdly, the experience of each principal in formal leadership positions varies widely and, as well, there is the matter of gender and its ‘playing out’ in rural places.

With these introductory observations about the final interview text organiser, I have identified six understandings from the data relating to next leadership positions. They are: *business as usual, self and others, values, planning, resources, and pacing*. In relation to my research question, how do principals of rural schools construct their roles, the understandings from the final interview text organiser are informative but they also seem to mask some of the things that principals do to construct their roles. Taking the latter observation first, ‘business as usual’, on the surface of it, says very little about how a principal constructs her or his role. There is a sense about it of the great Australian throwaway line often spoken in the face of impending adversity or when trying to achieve something against all the odds — ‘she’ll be right mate’. However, in terms of the focus of my research, ‘business as usual’ is a statement of substance when read and plumbed for meaning in the context of the interview records, because of the momentum and the inertia of the day-to-day business of constructing and enacting principalship. In other words, “the constructive work involved in producing order in everyday life” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p.698), as stated at the outset of this research, is something principals of rural schools say they would continue to do in another position.
‘Self and others’ is basically shorthand for the centrality of relationships in a variety of contexts, with a variety of persons and with oneself, that are the feedstock of constructing and sustaining leadership. This especially applies to rural contexts with comparatively small and thin population densities. MacGilchrist et al (2004, p.129) refer to the relational dimensions of school leadership as “emotional intelligence”. They take their definition of emotional intelligence from Goleman as “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships” (ibid).

‘Values’ as a learning for another appointment as a leader, while only identified by one of the principals, is instructive about how principals construct roles. Values, when considered as a resource for constructing leadership through focussing on relationships, may be thought of as a ‘living force’. Wheatley and Kellner-Rodgers (1998, p.12) argue: “…in living systems, boundaries are something quite different. They are the place where new relationships take form, an important place of exchange and growth as one individual chooses to respond to another”. Values are types of ‘artefacts’ for constructing a role that span and move back and forth over organisational boundaries. By this I mean values are not ‘owned’ by an organisation or an individual in the same way as real property may be owned for example, or expert knowledge gained through education, training or processes of initiation may be owned. In terms of constructing the role of principal in another location, values then are like a ‘transportable commodity’ that can be a resource for developing leadership in other contexts.

Pacing, planning and resources, while three understandings from three different principals and schools, share a common attribute in terms of how principals construct their roles — they are essentially means for ends. ‘Pacing’ foregrounds time as a resource and timing and rate of change, or the lack thereof, as inputs for the construction of leadership. Government rural schools are a particular type of complex organisation because, for example, they are required by law to be non-selective about who they serve, and also have accountability requirements that have to meet legally enforceable standards. Timing and pacing when considered as resources for ‘constructing and doing principal’s work’, when linked with other resources like finance and personnel, pose particular tensions and possibilities for rural leaders of these complex organisations.
The tensions and possibilities in small rural communities, like those in the sample for this research, not infrequently are linked to population decline which often leads to reductions in services, which in turn can trigger downward spiralling and the eventual closure ‘of the town’s school’. So, the stakes are potentially high for a rural principal in terms of how he or she constructs his or her role using the means named previously. Judgements made that prove to be inappropriately timed and resourced may well have serious and long-term consequences for a rural community. While similar claims can be sustained for urban counterparts, urban areas which experience schooling disruption usually have many alternatives available to ameliorate impacts. Rural principals generally do not have safety nets to underpin their planning and decision-making.

Senge’s (1992) systems thinking is a way of gaining a sense of connection between understandings from the learnings for the next leadership position interview text organiser, and the understandings from the other four interview text organisers. Senge (1992, p.68) defines systems thinking as “a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’”. As well, “[s]ystems thinking is a discipline for seeing the ‘structures’ that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high from low level change”(p.69). The full set of five understandings, taken together, encompass attitudinal elements like ‘business as usual’, operational matters like pacing and projects, behaviour-regulating understandings like mentoring and panopticism, and others such as values and resources. Taken together and with the extended data from which they are derived, the learnings about how principals construct their roles in rural schools are not ‘the complete story’. However, they comprise resources for what Senge et al (2004, p.1) call “awakening” to new and generative learnings about how rural principals construct their roles.

In Chapter 6 I attempt to progress understanding about how principals of rural schools construct their roles using Thirdspace and Three Worlds. The chapter is introduced with a summary of the main features of Thirdspace and Three Worlds that I draw upon and concludes with some implications for policy, practice and further research.
Chapter 6: Thirdspace and Three Worlds: How Rural Principals Construct Their Roles

Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to show that the theoretical tools of spatiality, Other, thirding-as-Othering and marginalisation, as derived from Thirdspace, together with Three Worlds and knowledge making, assist with understanding how principals of rural schools construct their roles. The chapter commences with a summary of Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) and Three Worlds (Popper, 1992a & b) as my theoretical frameworks; the details of each are in the literature review. This is then followed by selections from the data and analysis of framing in to the role and vision and learning, as scaffolding for my theorising. This means I have not interrogated all of my data here; rather I have drawn upon a sufficient range and diversity of it to “demonstrate the information richness of the cases selected” (Patton, 2002, p.245) for progressing understanding of how principals of rural schools construct their roles, in terms of Thirdspace and Three Worlds perspectives.

Thirdspace and Three Worlds
Thirdspace provides a unique way of theorising about how a rural principal constructs her or his role through the lens of socially produced space, or spatiality. Fundamentally, spatiality draws attention to the meanings and substantiveness ascribed to the social qualities, nuances and dynamics of spaces. These spaces may be defined or prescribed in many different ways, such as physically, historically, relationally, communally, conceptually or imaginatively. They may be context-specific or they may involve multiple contexts associated with a school, a community, or the ‘reach and coverage’ of systemic policy. Conceptually also, space foregrounds, but is not constrained by location as a variable for analysing and understanding what is happening in the complex processes associated with constructing a role in different contexts. The tensions between centre and periphery, and margins and marginalisation, as they might illuminate how a leadership role is constructed by an individual, are capacities of Thirdspace as a theoretical toolkit for interpreting and making meaning of what principals of rural schools say about how they construct their role.
In addition, Thirdspace has ‘within itself’ two other capacities that are particularly relevant for interrogating how principals of rural schools construct their roles. The first of these is that socially constructed space is ‘fertile with possibilities’ and is ‘always available’ for other ways, other interpretations, other understandings, to be pursued. Soja (1996) referred to qualities like these of Thirdspace as a “possibilities machine”, drawing on Lefebvre (Soja, 1996, p.81). Put another way, spatiality is a machine for investigation, for analysis and for synthesis. Secondly, integral to the composition of Thirdspace is that information and ideas may build, but may also ‘fold back’ upon themselves. This in turn may disturb and disrupt established conventions of how understanding is produced by “breaking out of the conventional temporal flow of introduction–development–conclusion to explore new ‘rhythms’ of argument and (con)textual representation” (Soja, 1996, p.9). This capacity of Thirdspace leads to a strong focus on the role of imagining in meaning making (Soja, 1996, pp.5 & 6) and also facilitates modes of thinking that are not constrained by “the material and mental spaces of the traditional dualism but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning” (Soja, 1996, p.11).

In Popper’s Three Worlds schema, World 1 refers to existing entities or ‘real’ things. World 2 refers to the “world of our experiences” (Popper, 1992, p.7) and is also referred to as the world of the mind. World 3 is the world of knowledge, the ‘products’ of the human mind. Popper’s Three Worlds schema is pertinent to understanding how knowledge is made by individuals drawing upon what they perceive to be the ‘real’ things of their contexts. Combining Thirdspace, and in particular spatiality, with the Three Worlds approach to knowledge making, creates a ‘composite’ theoretical framework. It essentially comprises three zones or arenas for theorising about my key research question: one is formed around spatiality, one is formed around epistemology, and another is formed through the interplay of both.
Chapter 6: Thirdspace and Three Worlds: How Rural Principals Construct their Roles

Other and marginalisation
So what seems to be occurring to enhance understanding about how principals of rural schools construct their roles when considered from the perspectives of Thirdspace and Three Worlds? Framing into the role is used first to explore this question.

Each of the principals narrated a different story about framing into the role and the process of selection for their roles. For the two females in the group, the experiences were ones of much greater scrutiny and questioning about suitability than was the situation for the males in the sample. In relation to fitness for leadership, the women, even though being selected via a competitive and open process, entered into their roles ‘being required to prove themselves’ rather than being accepted as having ‘something of value to provide’. From Soja, the experience of being Other, in this instance being female, at one level created a contested, even hostile, context for both of the female principals. In contrast to this, the males in the sample did not report there being the same, or indeed any, sense of hostility towards them or rejection of their entry into the local contexts. So for the females, they, in essence, were forced to construct their roles with a ‘handicap’. They were displaced and discounted by the kind of reception they received, or perceived they received. Put another way, they each experienced a sense of marginalisation, even though they held the most senior formal appointment in the school.

Rural towns and communities, as I show in my literature review, are often thought of as being more conservative than their urban counterparts. They are also places where the one who says something about a subject may carry more credibility than the evidence about the subject. As well, rural towns and communities are places which have a history that pre-dates a new principal and, presumably, one that will post-date them. There is a sense then that an incoming principal inserts herself or himself into the history of the town with the locals knowing that the insertion is most often for a finite time as prescribed by the contract of appointment. Added to this, there are often established social arrangements in a rural town or community. There are conventions which, while not compulsory, are often viewed as being part of ‘the life blood’ of the community. Country sport, often very limited in range and highly gendered like football for men and netball for women, is an example of a community’s lifeblood in terms of its social
structures and conventions. Another is the division of labour that occurs at community functions, especially those based around food, drinking, and celebrations like winning a local sporting premiership or the annual district agricultural show.

What I have briefly described above encapsulates some of the characteristics which imbue the environment into which a principal of a rural school is often placed. This being so, there is an expectation in terms of establishing leadership credibility, that time will be made to ‘study the history of the place’ and to ‘get to know the social scene’. However, left here, the richness of the understanding of context is truncated because it lacks the insights that come forward by tapping into what spatiality can reveal.

**Spatiality**

As a consequence of their entry treatment, both real and perceived, each of the female principals in varying ways used the marginalisation they experienced, used the feelings of hostility directed towards them, used the discounting of their expertise and prior achievements, to shift what they felt and were experiencing, from ‘deficit into credit’. One female principal dealt with the situation as she ‘read it’ by making forays into high status contexts within the community so that she could both observe ‘the opposition’ at work, and dialogue with them in their contexts. This is an instance of how spatiality is a rich and resourceful idea for understanding this approach to constructing leadership.

From the perspective of spatiality, what the principal did in relation to constructing her role was to take the initiative of creating space — professional and social space — in a recognised and comparatively high status community space, the town’s hotel, and then used it as a base from which to project her leadership profile. The principal disturbed the apparent status quo, the local unwritten list of things one does and one does not do as a woman.

In terms of Thirdspace, the principal imposed a strong sense of Other into the heartland of a context that plays a key role in maintaining the social structures and conventions of place and the oral, and possibly the written, history. The principal effectively demonstrated by her actions that a place like a hotel, while replete with rituals and conventions essentially dominated by males, is susceptible to being spatially invigorated and transformed into ‘place for other purposes’, in this instance, contributing towards constructing the role of principal of a rural school.
Chapter 6: Thirdspace and Three Worlds: How Rural Principals Construct their Roles

Three Worlds

From the perspective of Popper’s Three Worlds, *framing into the role* reveals other kinds of understanding about how the role of a rural principal is constructed. Continuing with the previous example, the principal was observing World 1 (the real world) by World 2 (the world of the mind), through drawing on her knowledge and experience ‘bank’ in World 3 (the world of knowledge), and she made observations about World 1 that she took back into World 3 for evaluation and checking against her previous understandings about real world contexts of the kind she now found herself in. This led her to develop a plan of action to assist with how she could construct her role according to her views of what her role ought to be. She then initiated action in a very particular place and monitored and refined it through World 2 into World 3, with ‘refinements’ travelling back out through World 2 into World 1. The hermeneutics of World 1 into World 2 into World 3, evaluation and then feeding back into World 1 through World 2, set in motion a theorising loop that contributes understanding about how constructing the role of principal of a rural school may occur in a particular context. Put another way, the principal made observations, assessments and then created new knowledge about what she believed was happening in the community, which is illustrative of Three Worlds theorising about leadership.

The mind, World 2, is the ‘centre of action’ from the perspective of human intervention and the shaping of ‘what is’ as well as ‘what might be’. As already stated, things change in World 1 by the forces of nature and through flux of time without the intervention of the human mind. Notwithstanding this, however, in terms of constructing the role of principal, the mind of World 2 is crucial for many reasons including that of its capacity of imagination which feeds knowledge-building, which in turn produces options and choices for role constructing. There is a significant link between what has just been stated and a key characteristic of Thirdspace, which is the ‘non-negotiable’ injunction to always search for Other, to go beyond either/or thinking, to never be content, to press for continuous critiquing of so-called ‘givens’. In Popper’s Three Worlds schema, the worlds are linked to each other through World 2, the world of the mind, and it is this which is particularly relevant for combining with Thirdspace, Other and spatiality.


**Generative machines**

Thirdspace and Three Worlds combine at the point of ‘forcing’ new thinking, fresh theorising: the former through an insistence on Other and exploiting spatiality; the latter by a continuous double hermeneutic loop between the world of real things, the world of the mind, and knowledge of the world. The primary stock of what is available in both World 1 and World 3 for use in making new knowledge is directed and facilitated by the knowledge accumulated in World 3, which is available for World 2 to act upon. In relation to *framing into the role* as an example, knowledge in World 3 is magnified, extended and enriched by other knowledge which is generated when spatiality is embedded and activated in World 2, the world of the mind. This is because “it is space more than time [or sociality] that ‘hides consequences’ from us, that provides the most revealing critical perspective for making practical and theoretical sense of the present” (Soja, 1996, p.165). Put another way, spatiality is like a performance additive in that it increases and diversifies a ‘stock of knowledge’ when it is incorporated into the processes for making knowledge.

Other evidence of the generative capacities (vice Soja’s “possibilities machine”) of Thirdspace and Three Worlds are dispersed across and within each of the other interview text organisers. For example, in *vision and learning*, each principal emphasises particular things, places and processes they use to construct their roles as leaders of rural schools. Specifically, for Carol, what seems to focus her attention very substantially is that it provides a vehicle for her to construct her sense of personal worth as the principal of Kent. For Bob, the essence of *vision and learning* and how he constructs his leadership role is situated with developing a set of values that he believes grows and sustains coherence and community. Ivan’s processes within *vision and learning* often appear to be embedded outside of the school and clustered around ‘working up’ ideas for projects to show that the school is a place of action and energy. Sarah, on the other hand, essentially centres her role construction around the issue of school survival and the recency of her full-time teacher experiences. Geoff, the most experienced of the principals in the sample, constructs his role in terms of *vision and learning* by seeing himself as a servant and a moderator of pressures from the community and the school.
thirding-as-Othering and Spatiality

Taking these inputs and subjecting them to Thirdspace and Three Worlds is also illuminating for understanding how principals construct their roles. With the inputs by principals about vision and learning, there is evidence of searching for something that will provide them with connection to, and traction with, their respective communities. One of the fundamental questions which all principals of rural schools face is ‘how do I connect with my community and remain connected in a productive way?’ Linked with this question and possibly preceding it, is developing some understanding of ‘who is my community, where is my community and what is my community’. In the quest for traction with community, principals do different things.

From the Thirdspace theoretical toolkit, thirding-as-Othering provides a different way of thinking about what principals say about how they construct their roles through vision and learning. Thirding-as-Othering ‘creates’ other possibilities by splitting dualities, or “crack[ing] them open” (Soja, 1996, p.60). In doing so, it sets off a “chain of heuristic disruptions” and contributes to producing knowledge and keeping spaces open for new ideas to form. As well, thirding-as-Othering is a concept that incorporates the property of self-evaluation of the otherness on which it is focussing. So, in terms of vision and learning and how principals of rural schools construct their roles, two illustrations of thirding-as-Othering emerge when it is applied as an analytical and explanatory tool.

Firstly, the issue of the philosophical location or position of the principal arises in relation to their ideas about learning and vision for the school. Some questions help to clarify what is being referred to here. On the thirding-as-Othering ‘scale’, are they near the centre or are they near the margins? More significantly, what comprises centre and what comprises margin? With reference to geometry because of its affinity with space: is the conceptualisation of centre and margin being done in a conventional way, or more of a non-Euclidean geometric way which is counter intuitive basically because things like parallel lines do not exist and planes do not separate neatly into two parts (Prenowitz & Jordan, 1965)? In other words, does the ‘centre’ hover around some ‘fixed point’ and is the margin like an arc of the circle? Or, are ‘centre and margin’ provisionally located, susceptible to being displaced, to being moved towards or away
from something, say through a review of values, a change in the purposes statement for public schooling, a reduction of resources?

Secondly, the processes of evaluating, while also doing, while also refining, while also constructing a role, are given prominence through the application of thirding-as-Othering. This is because thirding-as-Othering is, by its ‘nature’, provisional and fluid, but also because of its purposefulness in terms of disruption, deconstruction and reconstruction (Soja, 1996). In other words thirding-as-Othering is a type of machine that does quite specific kinds of conceptual work, which is akin to what principals say they do when they are constructing their roles through vision and learning. This includes searching for artefacts that will have traction and connection between themselves and their communities, while ‘knowing’ that the searching, while it is occurring, has to be nurtured, refined, re-articulated but also conducted with purpose as though what was being sought was something solid, continuous, malleable to reason, but also productive. Put another way, schools and education are always situated in a stasis–change dynamic. Spatiality, socially constructed space, is a resource for leadership for working with and through and around the ‘products’ of such a dynamic, which principals activate and use to create and re-create their roles. Thirding-as-Othering is always ‘on the hunt’ for something more than either/or options, and working with spatiality, socially constructed space, captures in Thirdspace theoretical terms, another contribution to understanding how principals of rural schools construct their roles.

Spatialised Thinking and Three Worlds

Popper’s Three Worlds schema, when blended with spatialised thinking, enlarges knowledge making capacity and provides another way to view how principals of rural schools construct their roles.

Drawing upon Soja’s (1996, p.10) understanding of Lefebvre’s spatialised thinking, socially constructed spaces are the ‘product’ of an interplay between three layers or planes of space. The first is “perceived” (p.10) space which is what exists, what is material. The second layering is “conceived” (p.10) space and the third is the “lived Spaces of Representation” (p.10). The interplay between and amongst the layering generates socially constructed space that is ‘ripe’ for political use, as in the contestation
of ideas, in terms of shaping, forming, reforming and promulgating behaviours and views. This particularly applies to representational space like schools, community centres or sports complexes because representational space comprises elements of the other layerings and is space that is “alive: it speaks…it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic” (Lefebvre in Soja, 1996, p.69).

There is significant variation in Popper’s World 1, the contexts ‘out there’, ranging from values, to identifying potential projects within the community to leverage the status and profile of the school, to gathering intelligence about what is likely to keep a school viable. However, this variation and resultant possibilities can be extended, essentially in an open-ended way, when spatialised approaches to thinking and knowledge making are activated. This is illustrated by Bob’s experience at Wickes.

Each World 1 is instrumental in shaping how the respective principals construct their roles. Bob is an especially interesting and quite unique example, and one that is considered here, because his World 1 also included dealing with the impact of a fire that destroyed an historic school. As well, there are the personal histories of former, as well as current, students that were lost in the fire and the reactions of community agencies to the fire, for investigating role construction and Popper’s Three Worlds. In short, Bob’s World 1 is rich with personal and institutional intensities.

Popper, in developing Three Worlds, argues against the Malthusian view of competition as essentially a burdensome force, and says (1992, p.12) that “competition can clearly be regarded as a process that favours the discovery of new ways…[and] these entail choice between alternative decisions…. Deeply reflecting upon the World 1 which confronted Bob immediately after the fire, a range of choices were presented to, and in some ways forced upon, him through his engagement with the theorising, knowledge making loop — the double hermeneutic process of Three Worlds, referred to earlier. In other words, Bob was required to make choices between many possible decisions, including what to say and not to say to the media about the fire, which he was very aware would have potentially profound impacts on how he constructed his role.
In the case of Wickes, its fire and the ways Bob reported, he responded in terms of making, refining, reviewing and using knowledge to lead and manage the school and its community through the tragedy of the fire, there is a sense in which competition was an impetus for what he did and, more importantly, for how he did it. It is not competition of a win–lose kind. Rather it is of the essence of World 2 as described by Popper (1992) and illustrated by him in his discussion on dreaming about flying and the eventual invention of machines for flying, World 3. In other words, in constructing his role as principal of a rural school, Bob used competition in the sense that Popper argued as part of his knowledge-making schema, as a catalysing force, something that fed inspiration, something that activated and stimulated feedback and refinement of decision making through its ‘urging’. As with the discussion of framing into the role, combining now with Thirdspace further explicates and extends understanding of how rural principals construct their roles.

According to Soja’s (1996, p.65) interpretation of Lefebvre’s seminal publication, *The Production of Space*, there is an insistence that:

> Thinking about space, each ‘field’ of human spatiality — the physical, the mental, the social — be seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical. No one mode of spatial thinking is inherently privileged or intrinsically ‘better’ than the others as long as each remains open to the re-combinations and simultaneities of the ‘real-and-imagined’.

It is the “real and imagined” property of spatiality from the quotation that I now consider briefly before concluding. The real, World 1 context of Bob as he watched ‘his’ school burn, was replete with churning for him about what had been, what was, what was being destroyed — transformed? — by fire. Watching the fire consume the school as he stood with other members of the community was an intensely pressured time for him as he struggled with the “real-and-imagined” dimensions of what was happening before him and with him. Spatiality, according to Soja, does not privilege one kind of thinking over another. Why then, has this been singled out here? Principally because, for constructing the role of principal, the ‘level playing field’ quality of spatiality neutralises the hierarchy that is often attributed to different kinds of thinking and different kinds of knowledge. In socially constructed space, the rational, generalisable and statistically significant knowledge, the anecdotal and the experiential knowledge are, in a sense, equals. At a significant role constructing time for the
principal (and many others), Bob created space for all voices, all levels and kinds of information and feeling to be heard and acknowledged ‘without judgement’.

The creation of the socially constructed space, spatiality, by the principal of Wickes as a consequence of the fire, and his fundamental framing about education and engagement with community, provides other insights into how the role of a rural principal is constructed. In this instance, there is blending and balancing of knowledge and emotions of the present against a longer time frame. Within this, there is the tension of managing how much openness about what might happen, what could happen, it is appropriate for a principal to place into the space being created by the progression of the fire event from initial destruction, through clean up, to forensics, to planning for replacements, to arranging events for grieving over loss to be shared and harnessed as a resource for renewal. Bob constructed his role, in the circumstances as described, by creating space and spaces for ideas and emotions to emerge and to be used to energise a new future for the school. Imaginings and the real were combined into a productive praxis. The disruptive power of the fire was redirected to become ‘regenerative fuel’ for the school and the community. Thirdspace and Three Worlds, as a composite theoretical tool kit, are ‘deeply at work’ here.
Chapter 7: Findings and Implications

Findings: A Summary

This research reinforces that the role of the rural principal is complex and multi-layered. This is particularly apparent in the ways in which principals construct their roles by way of learning, organising and visioning. The study also highlights the constancy of negotiation and navigation that is ‘part and parcel’ of principalship in a rural context. The findings confirm some of what is already known and they also contribute to ‘keeping the file open’ on how the role of a rural principal is constructed, especially given the apparently relentless pressures on small population centres from demographic changes, globalisation and the marketisation of human services (Hugo, 2000; Salt, 2004; Alston, 2005; Lawrence, 2005).

Principals of rural schools, in constructing their roles, spend large amounts of time creating and seeking out opportunities that have the potential to disturb and shift the status quo towards some other state which they, or they and some others, believe is likely to be more beneficial for students, staff and the community. Principals do this in many different ways including by questioning, by influencing meeting agendas, by developing links and alliances within and beyond the school, by moving around and through the school picking up clues and making suggestions as to ‘what might be done instead’. They also create and seek out opportunities that have the potential to shift the status quo by sharing images they have about the purpose and essence of education and by projecting a sense of control, usually tempered with a preparedness to enter into collaborations with others. As well they draw upon the experiences and advice of colleagues, and use various schemes or codes for reducing multi-dimensional situations into ‘manageable bits’.

In Thirdspace discourse, principals construct their roles by making or finding space to facilitate the possibility of new ideas emerging. In particular, they frequently construct or use established types of social spaces, both within and beyond the school, as contexts for this to occur. The qualities of the social spaces they create or find in turn have a bearing on what might emerge in terms of leading and managing the tension between
the status quo and change. Put another way, “social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-active, interdependent; [and]...social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent...” (Soja, 1989, p.81). With the space they find and construct, principals posit, advocate and prosecute Other while simultaneously working to retain and manage sufficient definition, sufficient order, sufficient sense of continuity to maintain organisational coherence and effective functioning. From the perspective of Three Worlds, principals of rural schools engage in a continuous process of knowledge making, essentially driven out of, and by, the contexts and spatiality of their roles.

Principals traverse the space they find and construct conceptually as well as physically, from marginal and boundary precincts to centre. Hooks in Soja (1996) when discussing the issue of choosing (my emphasis) marginality and using marginality, makes the fundamental point that locating oneself is not done in relation to something or some position of power, but in one’s own capacity. This is particularly pertinent for how principals of rural schools construct their roles. Rural principals look beyond the immediate environs for models and modelling of exemplary practice. However, it is the uniqueness of rural contexts and spatiality which has the potential to reframe rural principalship, from one of comparative evaluation with others, like urban, to one where rural principalship asserts its legitimacy instead of “rely[ing] on colonising responses to determine … legitimacy [and status and value]” (hooks in Soja, 1996, p.97).

From the three locational contexts of my research — school, community, and the school and community interface — a range of understandings, such as panopticism and engagement, have emerged from a consideration of the data about how principals of rural schools construct their roles. In this section I want to focus briefly on the differentiated treatment of males and females, particularly during the entry phase of a principal’s appointment, which is probably of most significance in terms of its impact on how principals actually go about the day-to-day work of constructing their roles. There is literature on this which has been cited in other sections of this research. However, what seems to be new from the research I have undertaken is how gender as the basis — rationale? — for differentiated treatment of females permeates and pervades the thinking and actions of female principals, and intrudes upon their private time. It seems as though if you are a female rural principal you are on duty, being
monitored, being assessed, and being ranked against ‘what a man might do in and with the job’, more or less on a continuous basis.

In contrast to what female principals have to contend with as they construct their roles, the privileging of ‘maleness and school leadership’ appears to be a matter which is taken for granted. One of the consequences of this is that males enter into school, community, and school–community contexts, in comparatively unproblematic, uncontested ways. They are generally afforded a ‘clear run’ at establishing themselves and, subsequently, building their career profiles. On the other hand, females not only have to contend with the differentiation, they also have to devise and weave into everything they do, strategies for managing and minimising it. This happens even when they operate by denying it, because to deny something is to recognise that it may or does exist. Put another way, community and gender combine to form a zoom lens that focuses in to expose, to reveal and to portray role construction by ‘women at work’ for scrutiny and judgement.

From the perspectives of Thirdspace and Three Worlds, the contextual locations for role construction reveal two things. Firstly, while small rural communities often convey strong patriarchal definition about the social and physical allocation and use of space, and female spaces typically “lack the public visibility and legitimacy of males sites” (Alston, 2005, p.143), Thirdspace as a possibilities machine, is a conceptual force for redressing this situation by profiling and progressing Other. This is primarily because Thirdspace ‘refuses’ to accept givens like those just outlined. It ‘urges’ those (like rural principals) who have to be in contexts where gendered differentiation denies and limits, to embrace its invitation to enter a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical [and other] imagination[s] can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible, uncombinable (Soja, 1996, p.5).

In other words, Thirdspace fires and nurtures spatial imagination for taking apparent immutables and problematising them to progress different ways of conceptualising issues, and then translating these into operational terms.
Secondly, the prevailing patterns of space designation — physical and social — in rural contexts is an important source of feedstock for creating new knowledge at a local level but with wider contextual resonances and applicability. World 1, the world of existing spaces, places and arrangements, while real and ‘out there’, are also products of World 2, the mind, and are embedded in the store of local knowledge about what is where, for whom, and why, World 3. While presenting the context in terms of Popper’s Three Worlds schema can convey a sense of order and givenness what I have briefly listed has actually been constructed and is maintained by particular understandings and acceptances. Knowledge making, which is at the heart of Three Worlds, when combined with the premise that there is always more than duality which is one of Thirdspace’s key properties, creates a potentially potent means for changing the status quo, and for helping to refocus agenda priorities so that sound evidence for doing something becomes less snared and enmeshed in gendered proclivities.

Implications: Policy, Practice and Further Research
The implications for policy arising from my research mainly centre on the preparation of principals for rural schools, and the subsequent professional support available to them once they have taken up a position. From the sample I interviewed, the preparation varied widely. The preparation can best be described as a mix of on-the-job learning through trial and error through to virtually non-existent. While on-the-job learning is a critical component of learning for a complex role, such as happens in medicine with the residents and registrar model for training specialists, it is insufficient by itself.

The dimension of a rural principal’s role that stands out from all of the others is the one that locates them in a context of high visibility and low anonymity. Put another way, it is community in an encompassing sense that presents rural principals with the most pervasive, most problematic and least controllable aspects of their role. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is also community which provides rural principals with a very powerful and potentially enduring resource for constructing their roles.

Rural principalship is often the route to becoming a principal of a city-based school. Colloquially speaking, ‘if you want to be a principal of a city school, go to the country’. Rarely is the situation reversed. This means that there are instances where the complexities generated out of and with community are exacerbated through lack of
experience. As well, the ‘do the country tour to get a city posting’ headset feeds into a sense of a rural school being one where the role of principal is learnt, and a city school being one where the role is practised and honed.

For systems of education which operate rural schools, the study shows that there would likely be benefit in having a policy which would ensure that those who aspire to being a rural principal, as well as those who find themselves in such roles by default, have access to extended, adequately resourced in-depth study of rurality and rural communities. The policy should address the matter of incentive for taking the study, and ensuring that the study is of sufficient intellectual challenge and duration to enable participants to develop the capacity to become theorising practitioners about rural school leadership and management.

In addition, policy specifically focussing on professional development that enhances the knowledge and capacities of rural principals for living and working in small population locations could, in turn, enhance their capacities to be leaders and managers of high quality educational services. Such policy development may help arrest the decline being experienced by many rural schools because principals will be working from a better knowledge and skill base.

There are implications for practice arising out of the research and flowing from the policy developments I have outlined. Firstly, while the policies have a green field dimension to them, the programs and actions derived from them ought to apply to current principals of rural schools as well. Secondly, the theoretical frameworks of Thirdspace and Three Worlds and, in particular, spatiality, marginalisation, thirling-as-Othering, and making knowledge, should all feature very substantially in the content and delivery of pre-appointment intense preparatory courses and professional development programs for rural principals. The concepts will require some translation into ‘user friendly’ language but not to the extent that their conceptual edge is blunted. The concepts have a sense of being novel and lying outside ‘what one might expect’ to find in a program on preparing and supporting rural school leaders. This is actually a strength because, if presented appropriately, the concepts have the potential to take people into fresh directions of thinking and consequent practice.
Chapter 7: Findings and Implications

The present study has looked at how a number of rural principals construct their roles. Further research with a wider sample of principals, rural as well as regional, would provide greater insight into the professional lives of these educational leaders. This in turn would provide policy makers and system managers with knowledge to progress practices that better prepare and support rural school principals in their important work. It would also provide policy makers and system managers with knowledge they could use to broaden the professional preparation of rural principals. The broadening of preparation could include practices that would enable rural principals to construct their roles in collaboration with other human service providers who live and work in rural contexts. Increasing knowledge and understanding of how principals of rural schools construct their roles, has the potential to create significant benefit for rural principals themselves, for rural students and rural communities, and for system policy makers and managers.
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