The *Formation* of Regional, Rural and Remote Educational Leadership

A Monograph

Dr John Halsey

Emeritus Professor, Flinders University, Australia

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The *Formation* of Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Educational Leaders: Some Contributions

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Contents

Section 1

Framing

1

The formation of regional, rural and remote (RRR) educational leaders has been an interest of mine for over five decades. It started when I was appointed as a teacher to a rural school in South Australia in 1967 . Since then it has been one of my consistent threads and themes through a wide array of positions including school principal, senior state bureaucrat, academic, consultant, and a reviewer into regional, rural and remote education for the Australian Government.

I prefer the term *formation* of educational leadership (hence the title of this monograph) rather than other terms such as development or preparation, for two main reasons. First, formation is composite in character and denotes something that does comprise finished/completed qualities but is also 'open' to growth and further refinement. This leads into my second reason: formation embodies the organic, responsive, and provisional essences of leadership and, particularly, of being *in* and living leadership.

2

My contributions toward the formation of educational leaders for rural, regional and remote (RRR) schools and communities are informed and shaped by five convictions:

- vibrant, productive RRR communities are integral to Australia's (and the World's) sustainability, and for RRR communities to survive, prosper and innovate, it is essential that all who live and work there have access to high quality education and training;
- educational leaders make a vital difference to learning experiences and outcomes, staff performance and satisfaction, community capacity building, systems policies and operations, a sense of worth, and hope-*fullness*;
- theorising about leadership and management is critically important and is optimised for the formation of individual leaders when it is illuminated and critiqued with diverse experiential accounts, the practice wisdom of those in leadership, and research;
- the uniqueness and particular qualities and characteristics of RRR contexts and communities, coupled with theorising and lived experiences, opens opportunities for reframing RRR educational leadership from one of comparative evaluation with others, like urban, to one where RRR leadership asserts its legitimacy instead of "rely[ing] on colonising responses to determine legitimacy [and status and value]" (hooks in Soja, 1996, p.97);
- preferencing space, spatiality and the primacy of relationships towards leadership formation provides generative ways and means to explore how RRR educational leaders and communities might create innovations for learning and sustainability.

From these convictions, three things are of particular relevance and importance in relation to the formation of RRR educational leaders:

- knowledge, understandings, and insights about RRR contexts and communities
- opportunities to consider a diversity of conceptual tools and ideas germane to the formation of persons for leadership roles
- time for reading, critical reflection, dialogue, practice, documenting of learnings, and more.

To complete the framing, a few thoughts on leadership.

Leadership is a dynamic blend of characteristics, behaviours, actions, and knowledge which encourage others to preference and embrace particular ways of being and doing. In the words of MacGilchrist, Myers and Reid (2004), leadership is "centrally concerned with ethics and morality and

with deciding what is significant, what is right and what is 'worthwhile'" (p. 149). Leadership is deeply and pervasively relational and this is illustrated in different ways in the following quotations:

> Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good. *--Joanne Ciulla*

> Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality. *--Warren Bennis*

> Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen, despite the obstacles. *--John Kotter*

> A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be. *--Rosalynn Carter*

> (Source: https://www.inc.com/lolly-daskal/100-answers-to-the-question-what-is-leadership.html)

Leadership and management are often used to mean and/or represent the same thing or to signify the two sides of the same coin. My stance is that this diminishes the richness and accuracy inherent in both. However, thinking about the co-jointness of both terms is potentially very productive. As Kotter (2011) argues, "leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action…management is about coping with complexity [and] leadership, by contrast, is about coping with change" (pp. 37 & 38).

RRR Characteristics and Challenges

3

Typically RRR contexts are characterised by distance and space, low population densities, close proximity to nature, economic viability which is often 'regulated' by weather patterns and single industry streams like mining, comparatively high proportions of low SES families, and enduring (but changing) gendered role allocations.

There are also very significant differences vis-a-vis the formation of educational leaders for urban contexts including:

- high visibility/surveillance and low anonymity—living in a goldfish bowl–navigating and negotiating propinquity
- community expectations, especially availability
- informal but complex communication; power and influence networks as well as formal structures and processes
- local history, traditions, conventions, valuing of place
- distances, demographics, gender, race & ethnicity
- close proximity and interfaces with nature and the natural environment
- impacts of globalisation, especially rationalisation of essential human services and market-based competition driven by economies of scale
- resourcefulness, resilience, inventiveness, improvisation
- limited and low-level infrastructure
- natural cycles and rhythms–immediacy of weather impact.

4

Major purposes of education tension and dynamic which RRR educational leaders have to manage can be represented as 3 questions: am I leading learning for staying, leading learning for leaving, or leading learning for agency and choice? Unlike urban contexts where post-secondary options are local, RRR students who want to pursue post-secondary education options frequently have to move out of their community. This in turn has consequences for the local demographic mix and sustainability of a community.

Schools in rural areas frequently have to be more than schools, often because they are the only remaining organisation in a town with links to all sections of a community. In addition to educating

and caring for children and youth, rural schools provide social centres, recreation centres, community libraries, health and counselling services, places for public meetings and voting, safe refuge centres, and more.

Educational leadership in RRR locations frequently includes taking on a range and diversity of responsibilities as well as leading teaching and learning and ensuring that a school operates safely, efficiently and effectively:

- school bus transport, route determinations and recruitment of drivers
- teacher housing and accommodation, which can have very substantial consequences for staff morale and commitment to place
- community organisation participation and leadership expectations, like serving on hospital boards, sporting bodies and service clubs.

Each of these responsibilities (and others) may involve sensitive negotiations and also have localised economic and political ramifications that have the potential to wash back on a school in both positive and negative ways. For example, decisions about school bus routes often have consequences for families, such as whether a parent will need to interrupt work like harvesting to get children to a bus stop many kilometres from home. Having a bus stop at the farm gate is also a benefit in terms of the capital value of a property as well as the likelihood of attracting a skilled employer with a family, for example.

5

Recruiting and retaining staff is often problematic and demanding in RRR areas. There can be fewer applications per vacancy, higher turn-over rates, and often less experienced staff appointed with consequent greater demand for induction into the profession compared to updating and honing expertise. Accessing specialist assistance for students with learning needs and behavioural challenges requires more time, thought and effort being spent on negotiating and arranging services. Year-level responsibilities are often larger (K–10/12) than in urban schools, and different industrial conditions for primary and secondary teachers can create complexities in developing a high-performing whole school culture.

As well, small schools (say <100 students) are predominantly found in rural and remote locations. They have complex multi-grade teaching and administrative demands. There is frequently a very large management as well as teaching load for the principal, and middle management is often non-existent. As well, schools may have significant Indigenous enrolments with students who are mobile and who require a range of health services and other community supports, together with care-full teaching and learning opportunities.

6

RRR educational leaders, particularly in more isolated areas where there are effectively no other education opportunities, may find themselves negotiating and navigating very complex relationships in order to resolve issues. Unlike urban principals, the option of physically moving away from a highly-contested situation until things 'cool off' is often not an option.

The pressure and expectation to be available and accessible to the local community '24/7' is an aspect of RRR principals' working life that requires more than just a few tips about time management skills. Historically, rural communities have looked to principals, teachers, health professionals and others to invigorate and expand local knowledge and skills, to broaden cultural and recreational options, and to add to a community's volunteer pool. Making judgements about which community requests to give priority to, and working through the ramifications for the school, is another dimension of an RRR educational leaders' role that requires thoughtful consideration.

Contextual factors

RRR schools and communities, like others, are impacted variously by many global challenges, factors and forces. An ongoing engagement with and appreciation of these forces is integral to the formation of educational leaders. They include:

- world population growth to 9-10 billion by 2050; Australia's will grow to around 35 million by this time
- increasing urbanisation versus regionalisation and rural (estimated 2/3:1/3 by 2050) and the concomitant consequences for food production and distribution, energy, territorial security, physical and social mobility
- climate change
- pandemic(s)
- pressures on the natural environment and especially species extinctions and the ripple effect on all of life, plus reduction of bio-diversity caused by relentless drives to explore and exploit natural resources for commercial gain
- the growth and spread of Artificial Intelligence–a digitally saturated world- –and perhaps a reduction in feelings of 'aloneness'
- hyper connectivity–the pollution of the instant, the collapse of the value of the journey (see Virilio, 1997)
- tensions (and opportunities) between world religions and the ways these shape culture(s) and societies and nurture 'unshakable' views of others
- massive disparities in individual wealth and overall wealth distribution
- intensification of competition and marketisation in all major spheres of human endeavour
- dispute resolution from diplomacy to minor conflicts to war
- the reach and impact of mega enterprises and ICT on nations and alliances.

The challenges, factors and forces arising more specifically from the Australian context include:

- ensuring universal access to 'the basics' for living
- the growing possibility of a 100-year-life for a significant proportion of the population
- expanding opportunities for Indigenous people and locating their culture, history and being at the centre of national life
- sustaining and valuing cultural diversity
- achieving an 'enabling for all' balance and blend of equity and excellence
- values that build and nurture social cohesion, value diversity, and foster social and economic entrepreneurship
- vast natural environments and fragile eco-systems
- geo-political locations and alliances
- modes of wealth generation and distribution
- national security.

Dimensions

As already pointed out, some of the defining characteristics of RRR contexts are space, distance and population density. Representing these numerically and then engaging with them is an important contribution in the formation of RRR educational leaders because they unequivocally reveal the scale, scope, diversity and importance of the overall enterprise leaders are engaged in, namely, *ensuring, regardless of location or circumstances, that every young RRR person has access to high quality schooling and opportunities.*

Foregrounding key dimensional aspects of RRR contexts, as in the following extract from the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* in Australia, also encourages–

invites–leaders of individual schools in communities large and small to see themselves, their formation and their work in terms of 'belonging' to a critically important whole-of-nation project:

> The landmass of Australia is 7.692 million km^2 (sixth largest in the world) and it has a population of almost 24.6 million. Just over 4.5 million people live in 63% of the country, comprising Western Australia (2.580m), South Australia (1.723m) and the Northern Territory (a population of about 0.25m). Further, while the overall Australian population density is 3 per km2, nationally it varies from 14,100 per km^2 in inner city Melbourne to 0.2 per km^2 in the Northern Territory. As well, only 18 population centres in Australia have 100,000 or more people, and this figure includes the capital cities.

> Another perspective on the huge variability in the population density can be appreciated through a political lens–only 6 members of the 150-seat Australian Parliament represent people living in about 78 per cent of the country….

> According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2016 there were 3,786,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students overall. Whilst most FTE students were enrolled in schools in major cities, those in other areas accounted for 29.3 per cent or 1,108,000 FTE students.

> Australia's schooling system has three sectors: state and territory owned and run Government public schools, Catholic schools, and Independent schools. Together, these sectors educate students in over 9,000 schools. In 2016, 65 per cent of students attended Government schools, 20 per cent attended Catholic schools, and 14 per cent attended Independent schools.

> The Australian Government Department of Education and Training data at the time of the 2017 Review listed over 4,400 non-metropolitan schools, accounting for 47 per cent of all schools in Australia. As well, there were over 2,100 schools in Australia with an enrolment of less than 100 and over 1700 of these schools were in RRR locations. Government schools in very remote areas did and do make up 84 per cent of all schools (Halsey, 2018, p25).

Section 2

Provocations

9

Central to my approach to the formation of RRR educational leaders is providing provocations to challenge and nurture their thinking and practices about leadership formation and their deep sense of *being in* leadership. Provocations are a powerful and nuanced learning mode because they enable ideas to be presented, freed from the constraining forces of there being a 'correct answer' that has to be discovered or adopted. Provocations in terms of learning and the formation of a professional practitioner, such as an educational leader, are fertile, generative and 'openers of possibilities' (from the Latin *patesco*). The provocations that follow have been selected to help individuals (and groups) critique and build on the knowledge, experiences and competencies already acquired over time. There is no 'right or wrong' way of engaging with them. They comprise ideas and ways of thinking, seeing and doing, intended to disturb and disrupt leadership formation in productive ways. Put another way, the content is anything but a list or description of competencies that, if absorbed and applied 'in the right ways', will deliver effective and efficient leadership.

I am not diminishing the importance of deeply understanding concepts such as power and its different kinds and sources in terms of educational leadership, or its relationships to (and with) influence and authority. Decision making is another focus that could have been profiled, so too planning, coordinating, delegating, modes of communicating, accountability regimes and so forth. Rather than focusing on those things, instead drawing on my many years of school, systems and specialist agency leadership, on teaching and supervising national and international students at Masters and Doctoral levels, on my own Doctoral research, I know that inviting students to engage with the kind of theories, ideas and priorities I have identified and embodied as provocations,

provides a rich way for leaders to be co-constructors of their formation. It also provides opportunities to interrogate what is offered through the lens of the more expected cum-traditional leadership concepts such as those named above.

Following are sixteen provocations. Neither the order of presentation nor the extent of the commentary imply any hierarchy of importance or requirement to consider, say, Provocation 7 before Provocation 8.

There is no prescribed way of engaging with the provocations because, as previously stated, one of their key characteristics is their sense of being openers and of openness.

The following are offered as engagement prompts:

- How might the provocation contribute towards my leadership formation?
- More specifically, how might the provocation contribute towards my leadership formation in relation to:
  - students
  - parents and families
  - staff
  - values, ethos and relationships
  - pedagogy
  - curriculum
  - assessment and evaluation
  - organisational priorities and arrangements
  - community engagement
  - resources and facilities planning and use
  - systemic and corporate contributions
  - career options and opportunities
  - 'my worlds'–professional, public, private and intersections thereof?

10

Provocation 1: *Choices Matter*

It is a given that the choices leaders make can have an impact in direct and quite immediately obvious ways as well as in ways that seem hidden and only become visible after an extended passage of time. Notwithstanding, choices made do matter, do have consequences, do create opportunities for betterment, do rule other choices out and so forth. The obviousness of what is being declared here, indeed the taken-for-granted-ness, is why it is important to present it as a provocation. The oft frenetic pace at which leaders work and the layers of expectations placed upon them by a myriad of external sources as well as their own internal steerage, can render the obviousness, the taken-for-granted-ness of the choices being made, invisible or a assigned a discount in the status hierarchy of things that ought to be paid attention to.

As Tom Fleischner declares,

> In a very fundamental sense, we are what we pay attention to… Our attention is precious and what we choose to focus it on has enormous consequences. What we choose to look at, to listen to, [to stand for, to advocate, to privilege, to nurture, to share, to let go…] these choices change the world (2011, p. 9).

Provocation 2: *Vision*

The literature on leadership is saturated with references to vision. Entering 'leadership and vision' into a Google search on 21 July 2021 produced eight hundred and nineteen million results! However, the primal importance of leaders having a vision cannot be overstated. It is fundamental, non-negotiable, a touchstone and a wellspring for all times, for all occasions.

Vision is essential for cultivating humanity. Martha Nussbaum (1997) suggests at least 3 capacities are essential to the cultivation of humanity:

> the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions–for living what, following Socrates, we may call "the examined life"

> an ability [for citizens] to see themselves not simply as citizens of some local region or group but also, and above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern

> narrative imagination… the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions, wishes and desires that someone so placed may have (pp. 9-11).

Provocation 3: *Premises*

In relation to the formation of educational leaders for RRR schools and communities, it can be particularly helpful to spend time arriving at some foundational understandings or premises to undergird the journeying and provide a source of purpose renewal when energy and commitment is flagging.

Two premises which I continue to find especially valuable are that the importance of rural communities will increase over the next 4 decades, and the big educational (and more broadly societal) challenge is shifting from knowledge for *building* the modern world (20th century) to knowledge for *sustaining* the world (21st century).

Those premises evolved from reading, thinking and 'experiencing about' world population growth and the trend of preferencing urban landscapes while paradoxically depending on rural landscapes to provide the fundamentals for living–food, water, energy, a healthy natural environment and territorial security. The premises also evolved as a counter to the prevailing belief that RRR contexts are deficit contexts. As I argued in my Elford Lecture presented at Flinders University in 2009:

> Deficit framing focuses on what is absent in a context, what is unavailable, rather than what is present, what is available. Put in vernacular terms, it is glass half empty rather than glass half full thinking. The opposite, non-deficit framing is not, however, a sugar coated pill, a set of words to gift wrap a problem or an exhortation to avoid confronting difficult issues. Rather it is a preparedness to think and function recognising the value of 'what you have rather than what you wished you had'. In educational leadership terms for example, do rural leaders construct their roles around a view that rural schools and rural communities essentially lack what is available in larger cities and contexts, or do they construct their leadership essentially with a pro-active framing? As argued by Danaher, Danaher and Moriarty (2003, p. 135), it is important "to challenge the orthodoxy that conceives of educational experience in non-metropolitan areas in deficit terms". It is also critically important for rural educational leaders to challenge the view that the continuing decline of rural contexts is 'an inevitable fact' (Halsey, 2009, p. 8).

Provocation 4: *Thirdspace*

Eric Soja (1940–2015) was one of the world's leading academics in the field of space, spatiality and social justice. His legacy continues to resonate and be of relevance. One of his major contributions germane to the formation of RRR leaders is how thinking differently about how space and spatiality may result in new insights about problems and challenges, like the focus of this monograph. To help with this is what Soja called Thirdspace. Thirdspace is an invitation to "begin to think about the *spatiality* [socially constructed space] 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*" (1996, p. 2, emphasis in original).

Integral to Thirdspace 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…" (1996, p.5). Spaces may be context-specific or they may involve multiple contexts associated with a district or a directorate, a community, or the 'reach and coverage' of systemic policy. Conceptually also, space foregrounds, but is not constrained by, location as a variable. The tensions between centre and periphery, and margins and marginalisation, as they might illuminate reframing are also 'properties' of Thirdspace as a theoretical toolkit for engaging with leadership formation.

Thirdspace has 'within itself' two capacities that are particularly relevant for RRR leadership formation. 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). In a word, *Othering!*

14

Provocation 5: *Margins and Marginalisation*

Reference was made in Provocation 3 to the prevalence of deficit framing of RRR locations. Counterintuitively perhaps, deficit or peripheral places can be locations of radical re-conceptualisation, can create new spaces/opportunities for thinking, different ways of seeing and interpreting, different ways of understanding and moving towards actions. Why? Because 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'. bell hooks (her preferred nomenclature) whose work Soja drew upon and valued, choses/argues for margins, marginalisation and marginality as opportunities and spaces for "radical openness" (Soja, 1996, p. 12). The nature and the power of the place of marginality is essentially transformed through the act of choosing rather than having it imposed, according to hooks (Soja, 1996, pp. 98 & 99).

15

Provocation 6: *Middle Ground*

Richard White's (1999) middle ground concept has its origins in his research and writing about the complex, dynamic relationships and rivalries between the Native American Indians of the Great Lakes region and the French, British and Americans from the middle of the seventeenth century until the 1812 war. While it is true that the traditional ways of the Native American were eventually displaced, the middle ground process he described about the lead up to this eventuality remains instructive. The heart of the middle ground is a willingness of parties to recognise that there are spaces, physically and

socially constructed, that are beyond and other than the 'home bases' of each, and which are productive for progressing their own agendas.

In White's words, the middle ground is "a process that arose from the 'willingness of those who… [sought] to justify their own actions in terms of what they perceived to be their partner's cultural premises'" (White, 2010, p. 1). Further, "[a]ny congruence [between parties], no matter how tenuous, can be put to work and can take on a life of its own if it is accepted by both sides" (White, 2010, p. 1). Through the process of working together, exploration and discussion of what White calls misunderstandings, "new meanings and through them new practice—the shared meanings and practices of the middle ground [emerge]" (as cited by Lear, 2006, p.3 0).

While White's middle ground is a product of "a quite particular historical space" (2010, p. 1) it is instructive for exploring the formation of RRR educational leaders. The middle ground focuses on creating physical spaces and socially constructed spaces: contexts for exploring ideas which Soja (as referred to earlier) would assert do not exert pressure for premature closure and that foster "continuously expand[ing] the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known" or possible, if constrained by current policies and practices (1996, p. 61).

First, spaces have to be created or discovered where continuous conversations about a school and its community can occur freely. Contexts which encourage ideas and the open debate and discussion of them are essential. Some basic procedural agreements such as all voices are heard and thinking that is tangential to the expected is encouraged, and the temptation to say we have tried that before and it did not work is resisted to give a fledgling idea time to germinate and push a few shoots through the ground.

Second, leaders and communities who value rural schools and the roles they might play in sustaining communities need to clarify and embrace what it is they believe is required for sustainability, in contrast to what others, and especially centralised services and bureaucracies, believe is required. The purpose of this is to identify points of commonality and points of disagreement. This process generates the bodies of knowledge around which the search for something other than the status quo can occur. Or paraphrasing White (2010), it is about making misunderstandings visible and using them as the basis for producing something new. In pursuing the sustainability of a community, a key piece of contextual intelligence that local participants need to internalise is that the closure of schools is most frequently driven by falling enrolments and is often linked with a belief that students who remain could receive a better education by moving their enrolment to some other location, real or virtual or a combination of both. This means that a major focus of their contributions needs to be securing the school so that it can be a hub in perpetuity. Paradoxically though, if this focus is driven too hard or at the exclusion of all others, it will negate or at least reduce the potential fertility of the middle ground. Why? Because a fundamental tenet of the middle ground is that it is more an organic space where nurturing and growth are fostered rather than a mechanistic space governed by rules and fixed agendas.

Third, for the middle ground to evolve and to function as a process there needs to be some equivalence of influence and power between the parties. This is a seminal outcome of White's research. Expressed in his words, there needs to be "a rough balance of power, mutual need or desire for what the other possesses, and an inability by either side to commandeer enough force to compel the other to change" (2010, p. 10). Put another way, from the perspective leadership formation for RRR communities, focusing on developing and maintaining bonding social capital *and* bridging social capital is vital (Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). As well, it means clearly defining what it is that the community has that others need, and persistently and consistently advocating this. In other words, the indispensable benefits of sustainability have to be trumpeted. In addition, engaging explicitly in politics at all levels of government and through formal and informal means is required. Continuous monitoring and assessing the risk of doing this is also required because, while White's middle ground research was set in a context where violence and physical force were present, which is not germane to

the context under discussion here, "the critical element…of creating and maintaining a middle ground…is mediation", which is integral to the evolution of public policy and the ways the political process operates in Australia.

16

Provocation 7: *Emergence*

Metrics and scale have become so pervasive in all domains of education they have relegated many other critical aspects of education to a subordinate, indeed in some instances almost an invisible, status. Today, much if not most of the years of schooling are spent in highly structured and regulated environments focussed on achieving mandated targets. There is an unshakable belief in competition as the best way–indeed the only way- –to motivate learners and drive up standards.

As well, the overwhelmingness of the formal years of schooling as the precursor to employment possibilities and pathways has largely displaced other vital roles of education such as citizenship formation, aesthetic appreciation and service to others. Learning and being, learning and making, learning and caring, learning and sustaining have been subsumed and rendered virtually invisible by learning and metrics. Is there a counter force, a push back against this apparently all-consuming approach to education that has the potential to productively play into the formation of RRR educational leaders? In short, yes. It is called emergence, as argued by Wheatley and Frieze:

> When separate, local efforts connect with each other as networks, then strengthen as communities of practice, suddenly and surprisingly a new system emerges at a greater level of scale. This system of influence possesses qualities and capacities that were unknown in the individuals. It isn't that they were hidden; they simply don't exist until the system emerges… the system that emerges always possesses greater power and influence than is possible through planned, incremental change. Emergence is how life creates radical change and takes things to scale (n.d., p. 1.).

17

Provocation 8: *Relational Leadership*

Following is an extract from a chapter of a book I wrote that was published in 2015. The reason for commencing Provocation 8 with this extract is to provide some insights into the origins, at least in relatively modern times, of relational leadership:

> The genesis of relational leadership is found in Mary Parker Follett's (1868–1933) pioneering thinking and writing in the field of organisation theory. Her contributions have had, and continue to have, a profound impact on how individuals in organisations live, work, make meaning and find ways to contribute, notwithstanding power structures and formal lines of authority and control. In January 1933, she delivered a paper to the newly formed Department of Business Administration at the London School of Economics on *The Giving of Orders* (Graham, 1996, p. 121). She had published on the same topic in 1926 in the *Scientific Foundations of Business Administration* (Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2005, p. 152). Follett's paper was revolutionary for its time, and in many ways still is. In it she presented a case for engaging workers in determining their work practices and signalled a shift towards acknowledging that relationships play a very large role in how workers understand what they are being ordered to do and how they will act. As Follett argued, "the arbitrary command ignores one of the most fundamental facts of human nature, namely, the wish to govern one's own life" (Graham, 1996, p. 125). Commenting on Follett's seminal ideas, Nohria (1996) declared that she "was, no doubt, the first modern management thinker to propose a mode of organisation that could serve as an alternative to the traditional bureaucratic hierarchy" (p. 159). Other noted organisation theorists have also contributed over many decades towards the emergence of a strong focus on

relations and leadership. They include Roethlisberger and the *Hawthorne Experiments*, 1941; French and Raven, *The Basis of Social Power,* 1959; Burns and Stalker, *Mechanistic and Organic Systems*, 1961; Senge, *The Learning Organisation*, 1990; and Acker, *Gendering Organisational Theory*, 1992 (Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2005, pp. 158, 311, 198, 441 & 450) (Halsey, 2015).

Relational leadership foregrounds the significance of leaders being and becoming (Giles, Bell, Halsey & Palmer, 2012). Context and contextual understandings and experiences are 'the bread and butter' of leaders who preference relationships and a relational approach to what they do and how they do it. Cunliffe and Eriksen (2011) argue that relational leadership "requires a way of engaging with the world in which the leader holds herself/himself as always in relation with, and therefore morally accountable to others…." (p. 1426).

Relational leadership is 'brought to life' and is made manifest through a range of relational sensibilities. They are "nous, tact, attunement, improvisation, resoluteness, moral knowing, pedagogical thoughtfulness and techne" (Giles, 2019, p. 64). *Phronesis*, a wisdom born out of and nurtured by thoughtful practice and a continuous review and refinement of it, is pivotal to relational leadership and the enactment and bringing into being of the sensibilities. As Giles argues, phronesis is "a wisdom grown through deliberately revisiting experiences of being 'in' leadership or being 'with' leadership" (Giles, 2019, p. 63)

<div align="center">18</div>

Provocation 9: *Gift Theory*

Lewis Hyde's seminal work on gift theory (1983) is the source and inspiration for Provocation 9 because central to his work is challenging the pervasive penetration of markets dominating all aspects of life and livelihood and reducing everything to some determined value. Counter to this is thinking and argument largely grounded in the world of the arts and works of art that foreground the primacy of *worth.* As declared by Lewis, "A gift is a thing we do not get [or something we become] by our own efforts…gifts do not earn profit, they give increase" (p. xiv). The realm of daily commerce transactions essentially meets basic needs but "a gift revives the soul" (p. xv).

Gift theory helps us to move our thinking about leadership formation beyond the functional and transactional dimensions to considerations of what endures and what is of enduring worth. Further, from gift theory we are reminded that the impact and power of a gift, the work done by a gift, is embedded in the giving of it, and that in order for a gift to be a gift, it has to keep moving, to keep being given–"the spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation…" (p. xvi). As well, assigning prominence to gift theory and leadership formation rather than leadership formation as a commodity, foregrounds and emphasises what Hyde calls the "feeling bond between two people [a team, a staff, a community, learners and so forth]" (p. 58).

<div align="center">19</div>

Provocation 10: *Storytelling*

Story telling is primal and powerful. It has a rich and profoundly important history stretching beyond eons. Yet in terms of its role and significance in meeting contemporary needs and challenges such as leadership formation, it has been relegated to somewhat of a subordinate place and status in the pantheon of approaches used by 'experts'. But such a stance denies, indeed serves to reject what story telling can contribute. As argued by Putnam and Feldstein (2003) "telling stories as stories is not to excuse ourselves from the rigour of social science, but to gain the positive advantages of storytelling". Further, "stories with their specificity and ability to express complex realities of particular people and places and their possibly unique ability to express thought and feeling simultaneously, are the appropriate medium for capturing a sense of how social-capital creation works in real life" (p. 6).

The stories we tell have the potential to instruct us as we listen and reflect on what we are saying and also to open spaces for others to become contributors to the story and storylines. Presented in an invitational way and with a sense of generosity, gratefulness and inquisitiveness, our storying is important, is formative and, like Hyde, can be a gift to others. As Sommerville (2007) writes, "in the stories we tell, we are positioned in particular ways and in particular sets of relationships" (p. 154). And to paraphrase her, the words of our stories are also *transformative*. Put another way, "the rich mixture of events, values, feelings, and ideas that stories communicate has long made storytelling an important mechanism of social connection" (2003, p. 6).

20

Provocation 11: *Affluence and Convergence*

What we chose to pay attention to matters.

In Section one I included a number of global and national factors that exert enormous impacts on individuals, societies and the natural world, whether we chose to acknowledge them or not. What we chose to pay attention to as educational leaders matters especially because it builds who and how we are as leaders. In other words, what captures and holds our attention grows our leadership DNA.

In my 2009 Elford Lecture at Flinders University I argued:

> …. new approaches to how educational leaders are prepared and supported for the vast array of opportunities and challenges in rural Australia are urgently required. Put another way, corporate, city-centric models of leadership are not sufficient to create, drive, energise and harness the potential of *rural* in shaping and building Australia now and into the future.

> Rural contexts have evolved and changed over time and will continue to do so. Rural educational leaders need to be able to conceptualise and actualise their roles and their associated networks expansively and from a 'why not' rather than a 'why' standpoint. They need to be prepared to take risks and actively explore ideas that may become, given work and resources, a vehicle for changing the ways learning and communities come together to progress new futures. Looking forward, there will need to be "an openness to ruralities that are quite different from those we are familiar with" (Cocklin & Dibden, 2005, p. 252). The capacity to accelerate the speed at which the evolution and change of rural contexts occurs has been dramatically increased through globalisation (Eriksen, 2007) and through the continued growth of the world's population. The pressures these place upon the ways communities function, on the environment and finite resources, as well as relationships at a multitude of levels, from one-on-one through to nation-to-nation through to trading/security-block to trading/security-block, are profoundly significant. The changes require—demand—a radical reframing of the role of *rural,* of rural communities in nation building and nation sustaining (p. 13).

The radical reframing requires grappling with the tensions and possibilities inherent in the interplay between aspirations and the ramifications for individuals through to global consumption patterns. Jules Pretty (2013) captures this very cogently in the following:

> … humans have been "betrayed by affluence", and … "the rogue word in GDP is gross", as it does not deduct the depreciation of vital capital assets. The concept of the wealth of nations… should include measures for natural capital, social capital and individual well-being. It currently does not…. It is the increasing convergence of aspirations on high consumption patterns that continue to drive upward movements in consumption. The affluent have set desirable benchmarks, and others aspire for the same choices and opportunities. This convergence on patterns of material consumption cannot be fully resourced by Earth (p. 9).

Provocation 12: *Capitals*

A major challenge for educational leaders (as well as many others) is creating opportunities to step back and away from the immediacy of day-to-day pressures and the limitations (as well as the benefits) of being immersed in a system and enterprise like education which has so much momentum and taken-for-grantedness, in order to think about *Other* (vice Soja, p. 4). The Capitals, developed by the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia Project, are offered to help with this challenge. They are especially pertinent to the formation of leadership for RRR contexts and communities because they provide a set of conceptual tools typically not widely used in education policy and practice and, from this, have the potential to provide novel insights about what might/ought/could/should happen and the like. As well, the Capitals generally direct the search for possibilities outside the school fence, thus helping leaders to locate themselves in spaces and contexts where influences and variables are typically not of an explicit educational character. The Capitals are:

- Natural capital–"natural resources, ecosystem services and the aesthetics or beauty of nature"
- Human capital- –"the abilities, knowledge and skills of individuals". The "attributes that are seen as particularly valuable for achieving community viability–often in combination with social capital- –are leadership, ability to solve problems and commitment to the locality"
- Social capital- –- "relationships between people linked in various ways… bonding and bridging. The role of human agency in achieving community sustainability is underlined by the distinction made in some of the social capital literature between capital (the stock of social resources) and capacity (the ability to draw on capital for valued purposes)"
- Institutional capital- –- - "the institutional structures and mechanisms present in a community… public, private and non-government, not for profit"
- Produced- –- - - "sometimes referred to as the 'economic capital'–[includes] harvested or manufactured products, the built environment… communication systems… financial resources… intellectual and cultural property" (Cocklin & Dibden, 2005, pp. 3-6).

Provocation 13: *Place and Spirituality*

The pervasive and relentless capacities of education systems to develop and issue policy edict after policy edict, albeit mostly after due consultations with relevant stakeholders, frequently neuters the uniqueness of place and places. Intentionally or not, it also closes down opportunities for place-based responsiveness or, at the very least, serves to perpetuate an overall perception of education in RRR contexts as being somewhat deficit when compared to education in urban contexts. And, in making such a claim, it also needs to be stated that there are outstanding exceptions to this which in turn provide a note of caution in the leadership formation journey about becoming captive to generalisations which mask recognition of diversity. David Gruenewald (2003) provides a more extensive description of what I have briefly outlined, based on a USA context and experience which is very relevant to RRR leadership formation, namely:

> Contemporary school reform takes little notice of place. The emphasis on state-mandated standards for teachers and students tends to work toward uniform, if sometimes segregated, skills and outcomes that schools are expected to promote. The pressure of "accountability" and the publication of standardized test scores in the news media reinforce the assumption that student, teacher, and school achievement can be measured by classroom routines alone and that the only kind of achievement that really matters is individualistic, quantifiable, and statistically comparable. Such an assumption is misleading because it distracts attention from the larger cultural contexts of living, of which formal education is just a part (Apple, 2001; McNeil, 2000, 2002; Spring, 1998). And

from the perspective of place, conventional notions of accountability are problematic because they fail to recognize the mediating role that schools play in the production of space (or social context) through the education of place makers (or citizens). Place-based educators often question reforms based on standards and testing because of their tendency to cut off the process of teaching and learning from community life, where students and teachers are "learning all the time" (Holt, 1989). Some even posit that pursuing locally focused pedagogies might boost achievement in relation to traditional standardized measures (Gibbs & Howley, 2000; Lieberman & Hoody, 1998; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000). But this is not the central point of place-conscious education. The point of becoming more conscious of places in education is to extend our notions of pedagogy and accountability outward toward places. Thus extended, pedagogy becomes more relevant to the lived experience of students and teachers, and accountability is reconceptualized so that places matter to educators, students, and citizens in tangible ways. Place-conscious education, therefore, aims to work against the isolation of schooling's discourses and practices from the living world outside the increasingly placeless institution of schooling. Furthermore, it aims to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there (p. 620).

Allied with the significance and role of place and leadership formation is spirituality and the contribution it can make when there is a preparedness to this being a possibility. I am using the term spiritualty here in a secular mode to stand for what is sensed when emotions and beliefs that feed and nurture our innerness–soul if you like- –are preferenced and profiled, such as joy, hope, beauty, and openness to being 'surprised' by what Carse (1994) calls the mysticism of ordinary experience. Profiling, indeed advocating, spirituality as a worthy resource albeit a 'soft' one for leadership formation runs some risks, not the least of which is a discounting of all that has been presented to this point. Notwithstanding, in my experience and from extensive reading and working with people from many different cultures, spirituality as I have very briefly described it is a real and valuable aspect of leadership formation.

23

Provocation 14: *Aggregated Effects and Sense Making*

Schools, communities, and schools and communities combined are sites of rich relationships for progressing, disturbing and disrupting education and opportunities. A key challenge for RRR leaders is sense making of seemingly disparate events. Associated with this is being aware, being attuned to the impact of the aggregated effects of such events. Namvar, Cybulski, Phang, Ee and Tan (2018) define sense making as the process "of clarifying and removing ambiguity and uncertainty by searching for and organizing similarities and differences from data sources through which goal-directed interpretations for decision-making are established" (p. 2). Further, the authors argue that "sensemaking as a process is the foundation of knowledge creation, where the quality of sensemaking affects the quality of knowledge produced and the outcome of decisions predicated on that knowledge" (p. 2).

A defining feature–fact of life- –for educational leaders and especially RRR educational leaders of small organisations of say less than 100 enrolments, is the plethora and diversity of the information sent to them from multiple sources. As well, there are many inputs of an informal and sometimes deeply personal kind. And then there are wider events of seemingly unrelated kinds that in unexpected and mostly unpredictable ways can suddenly 'demand attention'. Two come to mind from my previous experience as an educational leader and academic that provide some specificity here. The first occurred in the 1980s when nationally there was a major focus on Indigenous Land Rights and the history of and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, this at a time when I lived in a remote community with a very large Indigenous population, some of whom carried with them family stories that were

both very real and very painful. The second involved the rural school I was appointed to over 50 years ago where recently a vote was taken by the community on whether to agree to have a low level nuclear waste repository built in the district. The vote was carried but not by an overwhelming majority and there is on-going discussion and debate about the proposal.

<div align="center">24</div>

Provocation 15: *Hope*

A profoundly important attribute of an RRR educational leader is being a champion of hope. The contributions for this provocation are derived from a keynote address I gave as part of the Frontier Services Australia (https://frontierservices.org/) centenary celebrations in 2012.

Hope is both a straightforward and a complex phenomenon, simultaneously. As is widely known, it is integral to the great religions of the world and is often coupled in the Bible with love, with faith, with charity, with the search for meaning and connection to something more to life than daily routines and predictable patterns.

Mary Zournazi (2002) in her book of conversations on hope, sheds some light on the character and power of it:

> Hope…[is] a space opened for *something else to begin…* hope lies in the rhythms and the sounds that come to mind when you hear a word or a phrase–it's the possibilities offered… through exile you realise how necessary but elusive hope is…hope is the other side of despair… (pp. 30, 79, 83)

> To have real hope doesn't mean that you'll ever be satisfied…it doesn't mean that once you achieve wealth, or even a revolution, that the struggle is over. But rather one has to be constantly fighting to develop and push and make things the way you want them to be (p. 84)

> If …there is to be any hope for us…it resides in what I would call *care…* [diverse in nature] …there are many different kinds of attentiveness and courtesy which are frequently forgotten in a society more concerned with performance and productivity…[hope] is about renewal (p. 66)

> …hope may be that force which keeps us moving and changing–the renewal of life at each moment, or the 're-enchanting' of life and politics- –so that the future may be about how we come to live and hope in the present (p. 274).

Hope is more than optimism. Jonathon Sacks (2002) captures the distinction between the two in the following quotation from the concluding chapter of his book, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilisations*:

> Optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the faith that, together, we can make things better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It takes no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to have hope… hope does not exist in a vacuum, nor is it available to all configurations of culture. It is born in the belief that the sources of action lie within ourselves… hope is the knowledge that we can chose; that we can learn from our mistakes and act differently next time… (pp. 206 & 207).

Other dimensions and qualities of hope are explored by Jonathon Lear (2006) in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. The book "is a work of philosophical anthropology" which deeply and imaginatively considers the statement uttered by the last Crow Chief, Plenty Coup, when the Crow could no longer live as warriors–"After this nothing happened" (pp. 2 & 7). Clearly the Crow lived on but not *as Crow.* "People continued to act practically, but they lost the rich framework in

which such acts made sense" (p. 57). But throughout the Crow Chief's struggles and dreaming and searching for a future for his people, hope was kept alive, *radical hope.*

And what is radical hope?

It is hope "that is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is. Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it" (p. 103). Radical hope brings resources into play which enable people "to go forward *hopefully* into a future that they would be able to grasp only retrospectively, when they could re-emerge with concepts with which to understand themselves and their experiences" (p. 115, emphasis added).

Leadership that is *hope-full* is a gift to those who encounter it, to those who are touched by its passion and tenacity for doing good, to those who need to be reminded of what the human spirit will aspire to when the needs of others are placed at the centre of thinking, being and doing, to those who work and belong to it. Lewis Hyde (2006) writes that "the spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation…[and] when gifts circulate within a group, their commerce leaves a series of interconnected relationships in its wake, and a certain kind of cohesiveness emerges" (pp. xvi & xvii).

Leadership which is *hope-full* is a gift because the essence of a gift is that it is freely given away and passed on, around and that returns to nourish and move out again… *"the gift must always move"* (Hyde, 2006, p .4)

<div align="center">**25**</div>

Provocation 16: *The Ordinary*

There is a strong tendency in society and in organisations to devote significant energy and attention to seeking out the latest innovation, the most media-attention-grabbing idea and the best ranked or rated performance in fields of endeavour as diverse as sport, academic achievements, economic prowess (the top 100 companies) and a plethora of 'the biggest…, the most expensive…, the fastest…' and more. While doing this may lead to improvements and refinements in policy, practice and outcomes, there are downsides as well and especially if the behaviour excludes being open to what the ordinary can teach us. So what is *ordinary*? And why offer it as provocation for leadership formation?

Ordinary as used here is akin to something being common place, low key, not striving to be noticed and wanting attention. Ordinary is frequently taken for granted and accepted as 'the way things are around here'. Exceptionality is not one of ordinary's characteristics in terms of standing out for special noting and acclaim but rather exceptionality is a characteristic more so in terms of dependability, reliability and effective functionality. Ordinary can pertain to the natural world, the created and produced world of things and ideas and to people and relationships. Ordinary is also akin to 'the everyday' and routines and habits–soft scaffolding- –which help us navigate and negotiate life. Put another way by Carse (1994) who I referred to earlier, "Every step on our journey adds to what we know but it also reveals there is no end to knowing… [and our journey is enriched when we are open] to see how extraordinary the ordinary is… "(p. xi).

Ordinary 'invites' us to see and traverse beyond obvious and surface features of an object, event or phenomena or persons and reflect deeply on what might be going on, what might be being played out, what is absent because of what is present and vice versa and so forth.

Section 3

The ongoing project

The formation of RRR educational leaders is an ongoing and strategically important human resources project. It is complex, time consuming and always contextually nuanced. It is mission critical. Research, practice and countless first-hand accounts verify this.

Drawing on what I wrote (Halsey, 2013, p. 86) nearly a decade ago, in recent years there has been a rise in approaches to leadership which emphasise instrumental and technicist aspects of formation. This has tended to render as less significant, less valued, those approaches to leadership formation which are more relationally oriented, more disposed to exploring entry points and concepts which are 'outside the mainstream'. For the future vibrancy and sustainability of rural communities, it is critical that educational leaders and those who are involved in formally preparing and supporting them become open to different sources of ideas and impetus for this important work.

Jonathon Lear opened his 2009 Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Harvard University with a quote from Soren Kierkegaard–"To become human does not come that easily" (Lear, 2011, p. 3). The same can be said for becoming an educational leader–it does not come easily. But deeply engaging with the dimensional and contextual characteristics and possibilities of RRR and the provocations as offered in this monograph has the potential to help by generating fresh insights and ways and means of leadership formation.

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