Beginning female teaching principals:  
Gender and leadership challenges in small school communities

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ABSTRACT

The central focus of this study was to examine the leadership experiences of females commencing their careers as teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities in Queensland. The specific aims of the study were: first, to understand female beginning teaching principals’ perceptions of small school leadership prior to commencing in the role and to determine if those perceptions changed during their first year; second, to identify the expectations other school staff and the community held for a female teaching principal as leader of the school; third, to investigate the social complexities of living in a rural and remote community and the influences they had on the leadership experiences of a female beginning teaching principal; fourth, to understand whether gender impacts on the leadership practices of female beginning teaching principals in rural and remote communities; and finally, to evaluate the leadership experiences of female beginning teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities and their implications for future career direction.

Rural and remote areas of Queensland are populated with small schools, many of which are lead by young females commencing their careers as principals. They are responsible for completing the dual responsibilities of both teacher and principal, with little training and in some cases, limited classroom or life experiences. In addition, these isolated communities have been shown to hold definite cultural and gender expectations, frequently resulting in a high turnover of teaching principals (Clarke, 2003; Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Dempsey, 1992; Lester, 2003; Michael, 1996). Consequently, this study was interested in the experiences of females who commenced their leadership careers in these isolated environments.

Issues relating to perceptions of gender roles drew on Butler’s (1990) post-modernistic work on gender and sexuality. Butler asserted that individuals are constrained by the social norms that are placed on the performance, or the “doing” of one’s gender. She argued that gender is imposed on one’s identity and is a performance coerced both blatantly and subtly by society’s norms. As such, the social context and stereotypic expectations of gender influence how leadership is viewed and whether it is assessed as successful.
In order to understand the day-to-day lived experiences of the twelve females involved in this research, Glaser’s and Strauss’ (1967) qualitative research design was used, guided by a grounded theory methodology. The qualitative design was implemented to gain a broader understanding of the complexities of the role and because grounded theory allows the social processes within human interactions to be explored and for explanations to be developed.

Data for the study were collected through two informal, semi-structured telephone interviews with teaching principals and school stakeholders. The first interviews occurred prior to the teaching principals commencing in the role, while the second interviews took place at the end of their first year. E-mail contact was maintained with the teaching principals during the ensuing five years to determine the influence the year exerted on their educational careers.

The findings from this research indicated that the perceptions of leadership of the female beginning teaching principals underwent some changes throughout their first year and highlighted that they were unprepared for the demands of the role and the workload. In addition, some reported a need to change their leadership style to meet the needs of the community, while others were surprised by the level of self confidence and assertiveness required. The findings demonstrated the high expectations placed on female beginning teaching principals by the stakeholders and the level of influence exerted by the social complexities of the communities.

One of the primary outcomes to emerge from this research was that males continue to be viewed as preferred leaders in isolated communities. While some teaching principals reported negative gender comments directed personally toward them, others indicated more subtle innuendo, leaving them in no doubt as to masculinist preferences.

It is argued that future research into educational leadership consider the part disparity in age plays in acceptance of females, as well as previous classroom experience and the impact on self confidence and assertiveness levels. Of particular interest would be a comparative study of both males’ and females’ experiences in parallel communities, to determine acceptance.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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

Signed:...........................................

Cheryl Cleary Gilbert

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The role of a teaching principal in a small rural and remote school is unarguably multifaceted and complex (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Lester, 2003; Mohr, 2000; Murdoch, 2009; Murdoch and Schiller, 2002). In Queensland they have the dual responsibilities of providing education to a quarter of the state’s school students, frequently as the only teacher in the school, along with the administrative requirements of a principal’s role. Furthermore, given the intimate nature of small rural and remote school communities, it is anticipated that the teaching principal will play a more involved leadership role in the community than counterparts in larger, urban schools (Mohr, 2000; Nolan, 1998; Weston, 2000).

The culture within rural and remote communities tends to prescribe the expected behaviour of its residents and if the teaching principal does not conform to those cultural expectations, he/she faces social isolation within the community (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Lunn, 1997; Yarrow, Herschell & Millwater, 1999). Females in some rural and remote communities have reported that the expectations for female teaching principals are significantly more stringent than for males (McMurtrie, 1997; Michael, 1996; Russell, 1999; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Sherman, 2000). Russell claimed, “Rural Australia has a culture, which makes it difficult in many industries for women to take a leadership role” (p 4).

The way females and males are viewed within the broader social context dictates the roles assigned to them within the more narrow confines of schools. Regardless of changes in Australia’s cultural demographics during the 1990s, leaders continued to be labelled as stereotypically heroic, tough, taciturn and rugged males (Cubillo, 1999). Females attempting to establish themselves in leadership roles continued to be confronted with societal expectations that authority figures were men and that a woman’s realm was the private, family domain, or subordinate roles in the workforce.
This theory was supported by Australian statistics which showed that despite 80% of primary school teachers being females in 2007, only 47% of primary school principals were females (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2008). Cubillo’s (1999) theory supported Dempsey’s (1992) research into gender relationships in rural and remote areas in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, which highlighted a distinctly male-oriented culture. Females who challenged the ideology of male superiority posed a threat to the norms and traditions of that society. An even greater threat was the female with a level of power and authority, such as the school principal, who moved into the community, thereby posing a menace to the status quo (Cox, 1996; Grace, 1994; Poigner, 1990).

Further evidence of gender bias came from Michael (1996) who addressed the specific issues female principals faced in rural and remote areas. She claimed that in a four year period in the mid 1990s, one hundred and twenty-eight females, 71% of whom were principals in small schools in rural or remote areas, relinquished their principal’s positions. The reasons they gave were lack of acceptance of females in leadership positions; a sense of personal and professional isolation; safety and poor quality accommodation; and lack of appropriate child care facilities (p 1). More recently, Clarke and Stevens (2006) observed that an increasing number of females were staffing the small rural and remote schools in Queensland and other states, such as Western Australia, but their studies into novice principals in rural areas, suggested that:

_The challenges of the role are likely to be accentuated for novice principals in their first few months of appointment and compounded further if the incumbent is a young, single female._ (p 24)

Clarke & Stevens (2006) added that a female participant in their otherwise male dominated research, “... provides some insight into how complex interactions of gender, community attitudes and rurality/isolation impact women” (p 16).

These earlier studies indicated that meeting the cultural expectations of the community, while at the same time being a leader within the community, created additional challenges for females, especially as an integral component of being a successful leader is the perception that the individual’s behaviours are those of a leader (Greenfield, 1995). In other words, leadership begins with being perceived as a leader and the opinions and actions of stakeholders can impact significantly on the effectiveness of the
principal (Lord & Maher, 1993). Accordingly, leadership is an interactive phenomenon involving the leader and the willingness of others to be led (Klein & House, 1995). Gardner (1986) stated simply, “Unless followers are willing to be led, leaders can’t lead” (p 87).

For that reason, one of the more difficult aspects of establishing leadership for any beginning principal is managing interpersonal relationships with the school’s stakeholders (Germaine & Quinn, 2005). Germaine and Quinn found that novice principals tended to become defensive in conflict situations, jeopardizing their relationships with other parties and making them less collegial than their more experienced counterparts. Nevertheless, building relationships with all school stakeholders is a cornerstone of leadership, particularly in a small school community (Petzko, 2008; Rooney, 2008; Sinclair, 2002).

Despite the issues noted above, a review of the literature indicated a significant gap in contemporary studies regarding the unique challenges faced by female teaching principals in small rural and remote communities. However, following data collection for this research, during the literature review phase, Judith Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performativity was discovered and found to be relevant to the overall study of female leadership. In essence, Butler contended that gender is socially constructed through gendered “performances”, with gender being performed as an expression of the social norms and roles that society favours and expects and therefore feminine or masculine performances create the ideology of gender. In other words, gender is constructed and reinforced through social interactions, by the way work is segregated and by the power and privilege of decision making (Lester, 2008). Furthermore, culture and context define gender roles through the way individuals dress, socially interact and work. Butler (1990) argued that when an individual resisted the gender norms, society worked to identify those actions as inappropriate.

Butler’s theory was considered relevant to this study, as the definition and therefore expectations of roles and norms, was dependent on the cultural context residing within rural and remote isolated communities. By interviewing school stakeholders, that is other school staff and students’ parents, the perceptions of the way in which individuals construct gender and interact within the context of that structure, could be identified.
Gender perception was considered an essential element of this study, as the teaching principal role calls for complex performances incorporating the duality of gender stereotypic behaviour. Operationally, they were required to maintain a masculine and authoritarian style as school leader and principal, but at the same time, remain a caring and compassionate female teacher (Lester, 2008).

In addition, the gender leadership literature suggested that when female leaders attempted to use more female stereotypic leadership styles of inclusion and communication, they were not seen to be performing as leaders and were devalued as females attempting to be leaders (Collinson, 2005; Elliott & Stead, 2008; Hoyt, 2005; Langford, Welch & Welch, 1998). For that reason, pressure was placed on them to lead with accepted stereotypic masculine behaviours, which created unnecessary stress, resulting in poor leadership, leading to confirmation of the claim that females cannot be leaders (Hoyt, 2005; Langford et al, 1998). Essentially, this means that to be considered an effective leader a female must demonstrate assertiveness and assume control; although by doing so, she steps outside the stereotypically perceived role of a female (Langford et al, 1998; Schaeff, 1992; Schmuck, 1996). Female leaders may therefore be exposed to the creation of a hybrid performance, in which they are forced to incorporate masculine characteristics into their leadership style, but may unintentionally adopt them permanently, thereby legitimising the expectation of gender roles (Lester, 2008). This assertion coincided with Butler’s (1990) theory that constraints are placed on individuals to perform in a culturally established stereotypic way and that those expectations limit equality for females and impact on how they perform as leaders.

This study therefore aims to address the paucity of research into female leadership in rural and remote areas and add to the body of knowledge by providing firsthand accounts of the experiences of twelve female teaching principals in their first year as a school principal. By examining only newly appointed females it is possible to evaluate their preparedness for the role at the beginning of the year and at year’s end to determine which events characterised their first year. In addition, by including school stakeholders in the research, a greater understanding can be achieved of current small school community attitudes to female leadership and provide corroboration of the teaching principals’ perceptions. Finally, it will address the uncertainty regarding the
influence of geographic location on the experiences of female beginning teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities.

In order to place this research into an educational framework the following section will outline the history of public education in Queensland, including a description of the education system, the teaching workforce and teaching context.

1.2 Setting the scene: Queensland educational history

1.2.1 Schooling in the 19th century

Queensland’s first school was established in 1826 with sixteen students, children of soldiers and convicts from the first settlement at Moreton Bay (Department Education & Training, 2002a). Although the teacher, a soldier’s wife, was paid by the colonial government, the school was administered by the Anglican Church, since society deemed education was a responsibility of the church. The school closed in 1842 and although other small, privately run schools opened around the same time, it was not until 1845 that the first Roman Catholic school commenced, paving the way for other denominational schools to open. Nevertheless, many children in the Moreton Bay area did not attend school or receive a formal education (Department Education & Training, 2002a).

In 1848 Governor Fitzroy appointed the Board of National Education to create a government school system similar to that in Ireland, where parents paid one third of school building costs, guaranteed an average attendance of at least thirty students and contributed to the teacher’s salary. At that time the students’ reading books were the Irish National Readers, containing no Australian content (Department Education & Training, 2002a).

In 1859 Queensland became a separate state and the following year faced the task of providing education under one system controlled by the newly formed Board of General Education (Department Education & Training, 2002b). Ten years later provisional schools were established to provide education to a scattered rural and remote
Chapter 1 Introduction

population, where limited student enrolments did not justify the expense of building a school. A local committee provided classroom accommodation; and employed provisional school teachers who were not trained teachers, were not provided with accommodation and received a smaller salary than the lowest classified teacher. When student attendance rose to a constant thirty or more, the committee was expected to raise one fifth of the cost of a school which was subsequently managed by the State Board of General Education (Department Education & Training, 2000a).

In 1870, at a time when Queensland was enjoying prosperity due to the gold rush and a mineral boom, payment of fees to National schools was abolished. Shortly after, in 1875, the State Education Act was introduced which made education free, but under the control of the state; made it compulsory for children aged between six and twelve to attend school; and established the Department of Public Instruction to administer the Act (Logan & Clarke, 1984).

Settlement in Queensland increased significantly during the 1880s and 1890s, with a corresponding rise in the number of children seeking education. Accordingly, the number of schools increased from 231 in 1875 to 911 in 1900, which placed a strain on the state’s budget and highlighted the lack of adequately trained teachers (Department Education & Training, 2002c). In response to that need, by the end of the 19th century the number of provisional schools in rural and remote areas increased, so that by 1908 there were 640 provisional schools in Queensland. However, due to the depression and drought of the 1890s, many provisional schools were conducted in tents, bush huts, farm sheds, deserted hotels and verandahs of private homes (Department Education & Training, 2000b).

1.2.2 Schooling in the 20th Century

About the same time the Queensland economic environment improved, so too did society’s expectation of educational opportunities for children in rural and remote areas. In 1909 state regulations regarding enrolment numbers were revised downward, leading to a reduction in the number of provisional schools and an increase in the number of state schools. Furthermore, the provisional schools’ sub-standard buildings were
gradually replaced by buildings provided by the state education department (Department Education & Training, 2000c).

Between 1901 and 1932 an itinerant teacher scheme was established, whereby teachers travelled to outback areas to provide one-on-one teaching to students and to distribute books. Given the distances involved however, this service was limited to a maximum of just three times each year, which led in 1922 to the founding of Correspondence Schools to provide more efficient resources to students in remote areas (Logan & Clarke, 1984).

1.2.2.1 Demise of provisional schools

Between 1909 and 1947 there was little change in the number of provisional schools. The required student enrolment numbers became more flexible, with the department sometimes providing a teacher to as few as 3 students. By 1947 only 54 provisional schools continued to operate (Department of Education & Training, 2000d).

In 1950 the Queensland state cabinet formally announced that existing provisional schools could remain open, but no additional ones would be established. The Education Act of 1964, which replaced the 1875 Act, only made provision for state schools and in 1966, the last year provisional schools were listed, only sixteen such schools were recorded. By 1967, almost a century after they were introduced, all provisional schools had either been converted to state schools or had ceased to exist (Department Education & Training, 2000e).

1.2.2.2 Teacher training

The first teacher training college was established in Brisbane in 1914, prior to which trained teachers emigrated from Britain, or came through the pupil-teacher system (Department Education & Training, 2002c). Pupil teachers were young students, often as young as 14, who essentially became teaching apprentices. They trained before and after school and worked in classrooms during the school day under the supervision of experienced teachers (Department Education & Training, 2002b). Females formed the majority of pupil teachers, but neither they, nor trained female teachers, were trained in mathematics to the same level as their male counterparts. Females commenced aspects
of mathematics up to two years after males and instead of studying geometry or algebra they learned to sew. The pupil teacher system was eventually phased out between 1923 and 1935 (Clarke, 1985).

In 1957 the second teachers’ training college opened in Brisbane, followed in 1969 by another at Mt Gravatt in Brisbane and one in Townsville, which coincided with the introduction of three year teacher training courses. During the latter half of the 1960s and during the 1970s, additional support was provided to teachers through the appointment of district inspectors; followed in 1970 by the introduction of advisory teachers and teacher librarians; in 1973 by teacher aides employed to relieve teachers of non-teaching duties; in 1975 by the introduction of resource teachers; and in 1977 the Bardon Professional Development Centre opened in Brisbane to assist with in-service training (Logan & Clarke, 1984).

1.2.3 Schooling in the 21st Century

In 1969 the Department of Public Instruction’s name was changed to the Department of Education and in 1997 the name, Education Queensland, was introduced. Initially, Education Queensland was used interchangeably with the Department of Education, but in 2000 Education Queensland came to refer to just the state school sector, while the Department of Education assumed responsibilities for non-state schools, higher education and statutory authorities (Department Education & Training, 2008). There is a general practice within Education Queensland for employees to refer to “EQ” or, “the department”, interchangeably and this is reflected in the verbatim responses of the participants in this study.

In 2009 Education Queensland was responsible for providing education to 480,000 students, which was about 70% of all school students, in 1245 state schools. Half of those schools were located in rural or remote areas and catered for about one quarter of school students (Department of Education & Training, 2009a). It employed over 54,000 school based staff, including 36,000 full time equivalent teachers and 18,000 full time equivalent teacher aides and other support staff (Department of Education & Training, 2009a).
1.2.3.1 Queensland educational system

The Queensland school year runs from late January to mid-December and is divided into two semesters, with two terms in each and vacation periods separating the terms. The longest vacation period is during the summer months from mid-December until late January.

School attendance is compulsory in Australia, although commencing and leaving ages vary between the states. In Queensland, attendance is compulsory for children from six years of age in Year 1 through to seventeen years of age at secondary school. State schools are divided into primary and secondary levels with primary schools catering for children from preparatory (prep) year to Year 7 and secondary schools from Year 8 to Year 12. Schools are co-educational and non-denominational. In 2007 a variation to the system occurred with the introduction of a non-compulsory, full time, play based curriculum “prep” year for children five years of age (Department Education & Training, 2005). This was a factor which influenced the career decision of one of the teaching principals in this study.

State schools in Queensland are classified as a particular Band level based on a multifaceted array of factors, including the complexity of school management and student enrolment. For instance, schools with a maximum enrolment of 79 students are classified as Band 5 schools, while schools with a maximum of 199 students are classified as Band 6 schools. While these are official figures, an analysis of enrolments suggests Band 5 schools are more likely to have an average number of 31 students and Band 6, 100 students. Depending on the population, or remoteness of the area, some Band 5 schools have fewer than 26 students, the number at which an additional teacher may be appointed. Therefore, in many Band 5 schools, the teaching principal is the only teacher in the school. Across Queensland about 23% of state schools are Band 5 schools and 10% are Band 6 schools (Department Education & Training, 2009b). In 2006, six of the ten education regions in the state administered over 65% rural or remote schools, with 38% classified as rural and 14% as remote schools (Department of Education & Training, 2006).
Teaching principals in Band 5 schools are expected to maintain a full teaching load, as well as attend to duties normally undertaken by a principal and for that reason they are assigned a number of days off class each term. In Band 6 schools, the principals undertake half a teaching load, with the other half of the work day assigned to administrative duties. In this study 75% of the female beginning teaching principals was appointed to Band 5 schools and 25% to Band 6 schools.

1.2.3.2 Teaching workforce

Compared to the rest of the Australian workforce, teachers tend to be older, live in a nuclear family and be Australian born (ABS, 2006).

Australia wide there is a strong female bias in the teaching profession, which is mirrored in Queensland, where applications to study teaching are three times higher from females than from males and where females account for 80% of primary school teachers (ABS, 2008). Several reasons have been proposed for this gender imbalance, including that primary school teaching fulfils a nurturing role which suits the stereotypic female personality; working hours and the vacation periods fit with the teacher’s own family responsibilities; negative perceptions continue to persist regarding males wishing to work with young children; and the isolation and loneliness experienced by male teachers in a primarily female dominated workplace (ABS, 2006).

In Queensland in 2007, 46% of state school principals were females; while male principals dominated the principalship in secondary schools (63.4%). Special schools were the only sector with a higher percentage of female principals (59.3%), although primary schools came close to being equal with less than 5% male dominance. Table 1.1 outlines a breakdown of sectors, by gender, in Queensland in 2007.
Table 1.1 Queensland state school sectors by principal gender (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10/P12</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MOHRI Quarter 2, 2007

1.2.3.3 Queensland teaching context

Research commissioned by the Australian College of Educators in 1999 indicated that one teacher in ten had taught in an isolated location, with the majority doing so for less than five years (Dempster, Sim, Beere, & Logan, 2000). An employment condition for teachers working within the state’s education system, is that they are required to work anywhere in the state where teachers are needed. This system has become known internally as “doing country service” and usually requires three years service in one school in order to accumulate sufficient transfer points to be eligible to apply for transfer to a preferred location. The cost of relocation to another area is generally subsidized by Education Queensland and in the more rural and remote locations accommodation of varying quality is provided.

Queensland school principals are appointed through a merit selection process, with any qualified teacher in the state eligible to apply. There are no requirements for principals to have post-graduate qualifications in order to apply for, or undertake, the role of principal.
1.3 Defining rural and remote communities

Throughout this dissertation the terms, rural and remote, are frequently used and therefore a brief definition is provided. The definition is based around classifications assigned by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and used by the Australian Bureau of Census to present census data (See ABS, 2006, p 18). A full list of classifications of Queensland schools as provided by MCEETYA (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs) and Department of Education & Training is available on the department’s website and is used in this study to identify the geographic nature of the twelve schools involved.

It should be noted however, that there is significant diversity across rural and remote locations, despite the broad brush description used here. Each location is unique, based not only on its geography, but also on the economic, social and cultural factors which prevail. For individuals living and working in these communities, especially those who are not familiar with the way of life and who may be viewed as transient, these characteristics play a specific role and present distinctive problems and opportunities.

As a broad description, rural communities were defined as country towns and farming communities outside the major coastal centres and regional cities. Factors such as population; land use; employment; access to community services and government structures; and the degree of isolation, were used in making the classification. Most rural towns are a significant number of kilometres from major business areas and have relatively limited populations. Remote areas tend to be more isolated than rural towns, so that frequently there is no township, the name simply referring to a geographic area and business centres are more inaccessible. They may be subjected to more climatic extremes such as heat, cold, rainfall and drought; lack of public utilities and services; higher food prices; unreliable telecommunication systems; and vast distances to medical and other professional services (Currie, 2007). As a result, people in remote areas may feel isolated and removed from mainstream Australian society.
1.4 Justification for the research

Studies into the longevity of teaching principals in rural and remote areas indicated a transient population, brought on by a lack of acceptance by the community; their personal and professional isolation; the workload; and in many cases, by the inability of school staff and the community to accept change (Clarke & Stevens, 2004 & 2006; Lester, 2001 & 2003; Michael, 1996; Nolan, 1998). For instance, Lester (2001) reported that in one Queensland region 45% of the teaching principalships changed hands in a one year period due to workload, isolation and insufficient time to take care of the core business of teaching.

There has been a lack of research into firsthand accounts of female teaching principals in small school communities, but more specifically, there has been a lack of research into females beginning their careers in those unique environments. That is not to say there is not significant research concentrating on beginning principals, such as outlining specific training programmes (Bush & Glover, 2004; Petzko, 2008); strategies for managing daily practicalities (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Jentz & Murphy, 2005); dealing with interpersonal conflict and stress (Garcia-Garduno, Slater & Lopez-Gorosave, 2011; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002); and debating the repercussions of failure in the first year of a principal’s career (Walker, Anderson, Sackney & Woolf, 2003). However, much of the literature neglects the role of gender, or focuses on large schools in urban areas, leading to the assumption that the perspective of principals from this cohort can be transferred to female beginning principals within an isolated context. Because leadership is assisted by, as well as constrained by the social environment in which it occurs, the autonomy to lead is regulated by the leader’s social relationships; but research has frequently neglected to consider the context in which it is exercised (Brandon, 2002; English, 1995).

As will be outlined in more detail later in this dissertation, curiosity was aroused for the researcher in this study by the observation that more female teaching principals in rural and remote school communities sought assistance for stress related matters and were more likely to relinquish the role than their male counterparts. Questions were raised as
to why this occurred. Embedded in those questions was a further query as to the reasons why some female teaching principals were not exposed to negative gender perceptions, while other colleagues felt its full force. Were there influences or experiences within the community which negated those expectations, or did some female teaching principals perform according to stereotypic gender expectations?

For that reason this research placed context at its core. By articulating their perceptions about the role of a teaching principal prior to commencing in it and again following a year working in the role, the participants were able to compare and contrast their understanding of the job across a one year time frame. Using this format permitted clarification of any shift in perceptions within the specific context of a rural or remote school community. Other research has not provided this pre and post-expression.

1.5 Research design

A qualitative research design, based on Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) grounded theory approach, was used as the methodological framework for this study and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. In essence, a qualitative design suited this study as it provided a mechanism to build theories when variables were unknown and a theory did not exist (Byrne, 2001; Creswell, 1994). Rather than test hypotheses to verify predetermined ideas, qualitative research is designed to discover new insights and build an understanding of issues pertaining to a particular setting (Merriam, 1998). Grounded theory therefore allowed the researcher to explore the social processes within human interaction, collect data about the phenomenon and develop explanations grounded in the data, to explain the processes (Glaser & Strauss, 2008; Hutchinson, 2001).

Given the geographic locations of the schools it was determined that telephone interviews would provide the most efficient means of collecting data. Telephone interviews for data collection tend to be used less frequently than face-to-face interactions, but have been used effectively with other geographically dispersed participants (Holt, 2010; Stephens, 2007).
Chapter 1 Introduction

Data were collected through two informal, semi-structured interviews with each of the teaching principals and stakeholder participants. The first interview with the teaching principals occurred prior to their commencing in the role; the second at the end of their first year. The first set of interviews varied in length from sixty minutes to one hundred minutes; the second set ranged from one hundred minutes to one hundred and sixty-two minutes. The interview time for each participant was greater in the second interview than in the first. Due to time constraints and work schedules, the stakeholders’ first interviews occurred during the first term of the teaching principal’s first year and the second interviews during the first term of her second year. This structured process of interviewing allowed the researcher to compare comments across the twelve month time frame of the teaching principals’ first year.

During the course of the study the researcher maintained email contact with the teaching principal participants to determine their progress and to keep them updated with analysis of the research. The result of that contact was that she collected information regarding the progress of their careers following their first year as a teaching principal. Appendix E outlines that direction and the impact of the year’s experience on their leadership and personal circumstances.

1.6 Research purpose

The central focus of this study was to examine the leadership experiences of female beginning teaching principals within rural and remote small school communities.

The following aims focused this investigation:

1. To understand the perceptions of beginning female teaching principals regarding their role as leader within the school and broader small school community at the commencement of their first year and to determine if those perceptions changed during the year.

2. To identify the expectations other school staff and the school community hold for the principal as leader of the school and to determine the extent to which the current teaching principal met those expectations during her first year.
3. To establish the way in which the leadership experiences of a female beginning teaching principal are influenced by the social complexities of living in a rural and remote community.

4. To understand whether specific expectations regarding gender exist in rural and remote communities and if so, the impact they have on the leadership practices of female beginning teaching principals.

5. To evaluate the leadership experiences of female beginning teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities and their implications for future career direction.

Therefore, this study aims to contribute to educational administration knowledge by identifying specific elements that contribute to successful female leadership in small school communities in the first year in a principal’s role.

1.7 Thesis structure

This dissertation is composed of eight chapters. Chapter one has provided the background to the study and an overview of education in Queensland. It has also outlined briefly the research methodology and its aims.

Chapter 2 provides a framework for the research by reviewing the literature concerning leadership, firstly from a global perspective, followed by school leadership and the differences in leadership from a gender perspective. Building on this scaffold of knowledge is the literature concerning principals’ workload, the challenges they face and their training for the role.

The literature review continues in Chapter 3 by examining female leadership. It provides an overview of female educators in an historical context, followed by society’s stereotypic image of males and females and the challenges females face as they move into a male dominated culture of leadership. This chapter also addresses the manner in which females are viewed in rural and remote communities and the expectations community culture places on them.
Chapter 4 concludes the literature review by studying the role of beginning principals, teaching principals and the uniqueness of small school communities. It addresses their training needs and workloads and considers the relationships that exist between the teaching principal, other staff and small school community members.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodological research design that underpins this qualitative study and describes the methods used to collect and interpret the data. The ethical and operational procedures are also described in this chapter, along with an overview of the teaching principals, the stakeholders and small school communities that took part in the study.

Chapter 6 presents the data gathered through interviews with the female beginning teaching principals and community stakeholders at the beginning and end of the teaching principals’ first year in the school. This chapter provides insights and personal reflections of the participants on leadership styles and subjective experiences. It also reveals the teaching principals’ perceptions of their relationships with the community, its culture and the impact of gender on the community.

Chapter 7 discusses the findings of the teaching principals and the stakeholders, based around the seven themes which emerged from the interviews.

Chapter 8 synthesises the findings by revisiting the aims of the research and drawing conclusions, interpretations and implications from the findings. It indicates how the findings have contributed to an understanding of educational leadership for female beginning teaching principals and presents directions for future research in this area.
### 1.8 Glossary of terms

For the purposes of this study, the following terms, abbreviations and summaries are presented to give the reader a clear understanding of the topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td>ABS – Australian Government body which compiles national data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Queensland</td>
<td>Authority responsible for Queensland Government schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
<td>Authority responsible for all Queensland Government and non-Government schools and training institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>Language Other Than English – a curriculum subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;C</td>
<td>Parents and Citizens Association – usually comprised of parents of students at the school to assist with the school’s development and improvement, raise additional funds and ensure students and their families interests are taken into account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory (prep)Year</td>
<td>Non compulsory year prior to Year 1. Introduced in 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional/District office</td>
<td>Regional authority of Education Queensland’s central office. At the time of this study there were 10 regions within Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOS</td>
<td>School Opinion Survey – an annual state-wide questionnaire sent to parents, students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and staff to assess their evaluation of the school on a range of topics.

**Specialist teachers**
Trained classroom teachers who provide instruction to a circuit of small schools either personally, or technologically. They include music, LOTE and physical education teachers.

**Stakeholders**
Other school staff, parents, community members and district office personnel. Essentially, a stakeholder in this context is anyone with an interest in the school’s operation.

**TRS**
Teacher Relief Scheme – Qualified teachers who temporarily fill in for another teacher who is ill or on leave. In small schools they teach the teaching principal’s class while she/he attends to administrative tasks. This role is often referred to as "the supply teacher".

### 1.9 Chapter summary
This chapter introduced the basis for this research, that of females commencing their school principal career as teaching principals in small rural and remote communities. It discussed the potential challenges they faced establishing their leadership and indicated a predominant culture that viewed males as natural leaders and placed females in subordinate roles. Within this context, it signalled that throughout this thesis it would draw on Butler’s (1990) theory of gender and performativity, which purported that social practices and roles are expected and reinforced by the social norms that society favours and expects of the sexes.
The chapter continued with a brief history of the Queensland state education system, tracing it from its inception in 1826 to the current time. It included an explanation of the teaching workforce and teaching context within Queensland.

The latter portion of the chapter briefly considered the research design used in this study and outlined the informal, semi-structured telephone interviews with the teaching principal and stakeholder participants. The chapter concluded with a statement of the aims directing this research, an outline of the format of the dissertation and a glossary of terms.

Chapter two commences the literature review, discussing leadership from a global perspective, followed by a consideration of leadership from a school viewpoint.
CHAPTER 2
LEADERSHIP

2.1 Introduction

One of the aims of this study was to investigate whether gender specific issues exist in rural and remote communities and if so, the impact they have on the leadership practices of female beginning teaching principals. However, in order to understand the concept of leadership, this chapter will commence by addressing leadership from a global perspective, followed by a more detailed focus on school leadership. Included in this section will be a review of the literature relevant to the characteristics that contribute toward an effective school principal and an assessment of stakeholders’ perceptions of school leadership. The chapter will conclude with a review of the literature regarding the impact of gender on leadership, which will provide a precursor to the following more detailed chapter on females in leadership roles and in education in particular.

2.2 Leadership Overview

There are many definitions of leadership, ranging from the perspective that the leader is the focus of group processes and embodies the will of the group, to a personality perspective which proposes that the leader possesses a combination of special traits or characteristics which enable him/her to motivate others to complete specific tasks. Sinclair (1998) asserted that leadership was a social construct, the artefact of emotional needs, experiences and ambitions of followers, who bestowed leadership on an individual with particular characteristics and skills they considered worthy of leadership; whereas Northouse (2001) stated simply: “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p 3).

Leadership literature provides a catalogue of desirable qualities, skills and behaviours of individuals considered to be successful leaders, for the benefit of those who aspire to take on the role. Early researchers sought to identify leadership traits by examining characteristics such as physical appearance (height, weight, etc); personality (dominance, extroversion); skills and abilities; and social factors (Jago, 1982; Lord, De
Vader & Alliger, 1986; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948). Other researchers studied traits such as oral communication and human relations skills; motivation for advancement; resistance to stress; tolerance of uncertainty; and energy and creativity as predictors for corporate advancement (Bamburg, 2002; Bray, Campbell & Grant, 1974; Clark & Clark, 2000; Coleman, Qiang & Yanping, 1998; Cue, 2003; Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Hopkins, 2003).

More recently, research has tended to consider leaders’ behaviours, based on the premise that leadership is a set of things that leaders do, rather than on characteristics or personality traits (Bartol, Tein, Matthews & Martin, 2003; Gilley, McMillan & Gilley, 2009; Hill & Lineback, 2011; Lacey, 2007; Sankar, 2003; Sarros, Gray & Densten, 2001). In other words, leadership is the ability of one person to motivate another toward a goal; to influence decision making; and to get things done (Casimir, Waldman, Bartram & Yang, 2006; Hetland, Sandal & Johnsen, 2008). Leadership therefore, is not something done to people, but rather is a manner of working with and through other people, to achieve organisational goals:

*Leaders engage with followers in seeking to achieve not only the goals of the leader but also significant goals of the followers.* (Owens, 1998, p 203)

Taken in this context, leadership need not be a formal agreement. Instead, it is voluntarily given by followers who accept another person’s influence and direction and consent to being led (Casimir et al, 2006; Greenfield, 1995; Hetland et al, 2008; Northouse, 2001; Owens, 1998). It follows therefore, that a leader requires effective communication skills in order to impart a vision, provide direction and encourage necessary levels of change and innovation (Bartol et al, 2003). Other interpersonal skills include resolving conflict and managing people (Reeves, Moos & Forrest, 1998); building collegiality, trust and empathy and being a good listener (Casimir et al, 2006; Hattie, 1992); building support networks inside and outside the workplace and avoiding blaming others (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992); praising others’ efforts (Blasé & Kirby, 2000); avoiding abusive or bullying behaviour (Blasé & Blasé, 2003); and overall, being emotionally intelligent (Coleman et al, 1998; Crawford, 2007; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002; McDowelle & Buckner, 2002).
As will be discussed later in this thesis, having effective interpersonal skills was a recurring theme throughout this study. The teaching principals referred to the part it played in their experiences and the stakeholders referred to the impact of the teaching principals’ interpersonal skills on staff and the community. Moreover, the teaching principals credited the interpersonal skills of some community members as negatively influencing their leadership style.

Leadership can also be influenced by cultural diversity and although the focus of this thesis is on rural and remote culture, it is worth noting that cultural differences exist within a global context. For instance, Parry (2003) described differences between leaders and followers in North America and Australia and Casimir et al (2006) cited distinctions between those in Australia and China. Parry stated that Australians subscribed to the tall poppy syndrome, whereby those who stood out from the crowd were more likely to be derided and the attitude toward leaders was more cynical; whereas in the American culture, those who stood out were admired and respected. Meanwhile, Casimir et al reported that Australians exhibited higher levels of trust in their leaders than the Chinese. Consequently, Parry and Casimir et al cautioned that in some contexts, performance may not be driven by leadership, as much as by societal norms. Therefore, the context in which leadership occurred should be taken into consideration when evaluating the way leadership was exercised and the impact of context on outcomes (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Mulford, 2005).

That latter point is a significant factor in this research. The leadership styles of males and females, which will be discussed later in this dissertation, are influenced by the contextual complexities of large and small schools and urban and rural cultural environments and play a part in the perception of effective leadership. For that reason, a style that works in one school may not necessarily work in another.
2.3 School leadership

School leaders manage the day to day functions of staff and student activities and performance; ensure the maintenance of property, assets and finances; lead curriculum implementation and innovative practice; and promote development and change (Education Review Office of New Zealand, 1996). For these reasons the role of school principal demands a creative, enthusiastic, uniting and collaborative approach to leadership, along with good fiscal management skills, and the ability to achieve more with fewer financial and human resources. Equally important, the principal is required to keep the community, staff, students and parents happy, satisfied and committed to meeting the challenges brought about by declining resources (Schmieder, McGrevin & Townley, 1994).

At the same time, school leaders perform a vital role in assisting young people in their quest to acquire knowledge. As such, Goldring and Greenfield (2002) alleged that school based leadership differed from leadership in other contexts through four significant factors: (1) the moral dimensions, involving value judgements the principal must make which impact on school students and their future; (2) public trust, which must be encouraged, despite possible social and political ramifications; (3) teaching and learning, including teacher and student personalities, a changing curriculum and expectations; and (4) managing the emotional and cognitive dissonance of a broad range of stakeholders.

Furthermore, school leadership in the 21st century is fundamentally different from that of a few decades ago (Bamburg 2002). In the mid-20th century school principals were expected to have the technical skills to run a hierarchically structured bureaucracy (Bamburg, 2002); in the 1970s there was “the great man” theory, which suggested if a school was not performing successfully, it was the principal’s fault (Bamburg, 2002; Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Leithwood, 1994; Loader, 2002); and at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, schools were seen as learning organisations in which everyone had the capacity to access new information and everyone was regarded as a learner (Bamburg, 2002). In a technologically complex 21st century the school leader was faced with multifaceted demands of being the primary change agent; an expert in
teaching and pedagogy; a good listener; a proponent of collaborative leadership and decision making; to have an unwavering commitment to the school’s vision and mission statement; to encourage a positive school climate; and be focused on social justice; while ensuring the environment strove for continuous improvement (Clark & Clark, 2000; Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

More than twenty-five years ago Sungaila (1982) made similar comments when she observed the heavy burden that confronted school principals and the personal conflict it undoubtedly created. More recently, Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe and Meyerson (2005) made comparable observations when they reviewed the extensive demands placed on the principal’s time and the need for them to be instructional leaders, disciplinarians, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers and oversee policy mandates and initiatives.

There is no argument that the role of school principal is a diverse and demanding one. Essentially, it is a role constantly being defined and redefined, or put succinctly, it is “a work in progress” (Daresh, Gantner, Dunlap & Hvizdak, 2000, p 71). In describing the many capabilities of an effective school principal Daresh et al concluded, “The principalship therefore might be conceptualised as an art form surrounded by a sea of chaos” (p 78).

Consequently, any attempt to distinguish a single personality type as an effective school principal would most likely fail. Schools are complex institutions and as mentioned earlier, while a principal may be successful at one, may well fail at another. The professional and personal skills and characteristics which contribute to success in a large, inner urban school may have the reverse consequences in a small rural school (Bassett, Cullen & Logan, 1984).

The role of the school principal has been outlined here in order to provide a background to understanding the complexity of the role, especially, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, teaching principals undertake all that has been mentioned so far, as well as prepare, plan and teach students. It warrants reiterating at this point that, within Education
Queensland, there is no mandatory training for school principals and no formal qualification, other than teaching, is required.

The following section will examine more closely the qualities of those principals labelled as effective. In a later section of this dissertation these qualities will be addressed in relation to the participants in this study.

2.3.1 Effective Principals

Various assessments have been used to classify a principal as effective, including improved student outcomes and the perceptions of school stakeholders. As noted earlier, a plethora of literature extolling idealistic expectations of school principals exists, but as Greenfield (1982) claimed, “...principals must successfully juggle a ‘cluster’ of different demands if they are to be effective” (p 14). Included in those expectations was the belief that effective principals would assist the school community realise its potential, while having a vision of what the school should be like (Persell and Cookson, 1982); that they ensure a sense of community in which goals and expectations were shared and achieved by school stakeholders (Purkey & Smith, 1985); and that they were visionaries and doers, setting positive examples through their actions and ensuring that all stakeholders adhered to its values (Duignan, 1987).

Two decades later the perception of what constituted an effective principal had not changed. A review of the extensive literature indicated that the most frequently cited characteristics and skills included communication; establishing interpersonal relationships; resilience; motivating staff; creating an effective learning environment; understanding and leading the change process; modelling lifelong learning; setting goals; higher order thinking; and being conscious of the school’s unique contextual setting (Fullan, 2002; Gilley et al, 2009; Kruger, 2009; Leithwood, 2005; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010; Notman, Henry, Latham, Potaka, Slowley & Ross, 2008; Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002; J. Watterston, 2008).

Although it is not within the parameters of this research to investigate the impact of school leadership on student outcomes, it deserves to be mentioned that most studies of leadership refer to the principal’s influence on student achievement as an essential
indicator of effectiveness (Collins, 2002a; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Mulford & Johns, 2004). Based on his research into the impact of leadership on teacher and school performance in Australia, Watterston (2008) concluded:

*I have come to the conclusion that a school’s outcomes are impacted significantly by the competency and quality of the principal. While it is clear that there are many factors that determine the overall performance of a school, the ability of the school principal to motivate, organise, manage and facilitate an achievable vision is a key determinant of the perceptions of quality of that environment by key stakeholders. (pp1-2)*

Researchers have revealed that effective principal leadership is not demonstrated in the same manner by each principal, but is influenced in no small way by the wider school context. Variables have included the school’s location; its culture; the competence of the school teachers; school size; and organizational structure (Casey-Hurley, 1999; Hallinger, 2003; Hausman, Crow & Sperry, 2000; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010; Ray, Clegg and Gordon, 2004; Riley & MacBeath, 2003; Southworth, 1999). These findings were given stronger impetus by a New Zealand study of effective school principals in six geographically diverse schools in New Zealand, where researchers deduced that how the principals, “respond to the unique set of contextual circumstances presented to them”, was the defining distinction in being effective (Notman et al, 2008, p 8). Notman et al’s observation was particularly relevant to this research, given its emphasis on context in geographic locations in Queensland.

As mentioned earlier, leaders cannot lead without followers, and the perceptions of followers can impact on the effectiveness of the leader. The following section will briefly consider the literature in this regard and will provide a backdrop to the interviews conducted with stakeholders in this study.

2.3.2 Followers’ perceptions of principal leadership

Studies have indicated that followers’ perceptions of leadership are formed by matching leadership prototypes to their observations of the leader in specific situations, (Klein & House, 1995; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997; Lord, 1985; Lord & Maher, 1993).
In an Australian study, teachers in Victoria’s state schools reported that they perceived principals to be effective leaders when they trusted teachers to do their jobs and gave them autonomy to do so (Gurr, 1995, 1996). Internationally, researchers agreed that followers’ perceptions were influenced by the principal’s ability to promote a collaborative school culture; by a repertoire of interpersonal skills; and by being a strategic, reflective practitioner (Blase & Blase, 2001; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Day and Harris, 1999). On the other hand, followers perceived principals to be ineffective leaders if they lacked interpersonal skills such as communication; were abrasive, arrogant and inattentive to staff needs; or if they demonstrated poor problem solving skills (Davis, 1997; Deluca, Rogus, Raisch & Place, 1997; Harris & Willower, 1998; Johnson and Birkeland, 2003).

Closer to home, a Queensland study found that despite the principal’s best efforts, stakeholders held their own unique, individual perceptions of the school principal’s leadership (Dempster, 2001). Dempster discovered that principal leadership was defined by students as being visible and equitable; by parents as demonstrating efficient management of the school, taking responsibility for the students and having personal qualities that suited the community; and by staff as building constructive relationships with stakeholders and having positive personal characteristics. Dempster noted that the stakeholders’ perceptions of principal leadership contrasted with those of employing authorities, who perceived that principal leadership was symbolised by being a change agent and an efficient manager and mediator.

This current study touched on issues raised by Dempster (2001). Although students were not included in the interviews, the responses of school staff and parents indicated clear perceptions of what they, as followers, expected from the school leader. This study deviated from Dempster’s research however, by specifically targeting rural and remote communities and focusing on female leadership.

The impact of gender and age on followers’ perceptions of leadership has not been overlooked in the research literature. For instance, females were perceived to possess leadership characteristics of communication, collaboration and involvement more often than males (Eagly & Johnson, 1990); younger and less experienced teachers were more
likely to lead positive school reforms and to motivate staff (Lord et al, 1986); middle aged leaders were more likely to be identified as leaders than younger leaders (Lord & Maher, 1993); females placed less trust in leaders of their own sex than they did in males (Jeanquart-Barone & Sekaran, 1994); and males were perceived as leaders more often than females (Lee, Smith & Cioco, 1993). Whereas the studies cited above addressed perceptions of leadership from a broad perspective, this current research is context and gender specific. Moreover, age and gender were concomitant in this study, given that five of the twelve teaching principal participants were in the younger 20 to 30 year age group.

The next section will address female leadership from the perspective of perceived differences in male and female leadership characteristics. This will set the scene for the next chapter, which will consider the role of females in education and in small rural and remote communities in greater detail.

2.4 Leadership and gender

Of particular interest to this research, is the way in which gender leadership is viewed and the impact that has on female teaching principals’ leadership in rural and remote areas of Queensland.

Before discussing the role of gender in leadership in more detail, it should be noted that as a general rule, the word sex is used to refer to male and female biological categories based on genitalia, or prior to birth, by chromosomal typing (Reskin, 1991; West & Zimmerman, 1991). On the other hand, gender refers to socially created distinctions between the sexes and the assignment of the terms feminine and masculine (Reese, 1995). West and Zimmerman (1991) asserted that gender is produced through social interaction; it is something a person “does” according to societal rules, rather than something a person is, or has, and is never completely accomplished, but is always in production through social interaction. This fits with Butler’s (1990) theory, when she rejected the notion of gender as an essential or natural category, but declared it to be performative. However, she clarified that performativity should not be misunderstood as
performance; it is not meant that an individual chooses from among genders of choice and dons it for the day (McMillen, 1997). Instead, the performative is enacted, as gender is “done” in interactive social settings under the influence of socially established meanings.

Essentially, Butler (1990) challenged the assumption that sex is biological and gender is constructed. Furthermore, she argued that women should not be viewed as a unified homogenous group, since everyone is a unique individual and she criticised contemporary feminism for asserting that women were a group with common characteristics. She believed this reinforced a binary view of individuals being divided into two distinct groups, women and men. She asserted that women should not be identified in terms of their sex, because if women are categorised as those who are capable of giving birth, a large number of women who are either incapable of, or do not wish to have children, would be excluded. Butler contended that feminists developed an account of a patriarchal culture which assumed that gender would be built through culture, with no choice or differences. Instead, she maintained that gender is imposed on one’s identity and therefore is not a primary category, but an attribute; a performance coerced both blatantly and subtly by society’s norms. “There is no gender identity behind the ‘expressions’ of gender;...identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1990, p 25). In other words, gender is not what an individual does at certain times, but is a performance which gains credibility through reiterative practice (Stelmok & Wilson, 2005). Feminine and masculine, or woman and man, are not based on ideal forms, but are the effects of the culturally reiterated practices of “doing” gender and sexuality and are in a constant state of flux (Butler, 1990). As such, gender, whether masculinity or femininity, is an achievement, rather than a biological factor (Binns, 2008; Young, 1998).

When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one. (Butler, 1990, p 6)
Accordingly, Butler (1990) advocated for a new way of considering sex and gender and purported that constraints are placed on individuals through the norms that govern the performance, or the “doing”, of one’s gender. Rather than seeing masculine and feminine as a gender binary, Butler argued that gender is a variable and individuals should be seen by the way they behave at different times and in different situations (Young, 1998). She suggested that by “deconstructing” the way we think about gender a new equality is possible, where individuals are not restricted by masculine or feminine gender roles:

> Gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, ...gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed...There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results. (Butler, 1990, p 24-25)

Nevertheless, other literature suggested that there are substantial disparities between male and female leadership characteristics. For instance, male leaders have historically been described as authoritarian, competitive, decisive and charismatic, while female leaders have been described as kind, nurturing, less hierarchical, democratic, flexible and with greater sensitivity than male leaders (Hoyt, 2005; Ozga, 1993; Pitner, 1981). Female leaders were seen to spend less time at their desks; mentored other females more often than males mentored other males; were seen to emphasise staff cohesiveness; fostered an integrative culture and climate; coped better with routine stress; did not outwardly express anger; and valued group activities (Boyle, 2001; Celikten, 2005; Embry, Padgett & Caldwell, 2008; Larusdottir, 2007; Schnurr, 2008). Male leaders were described as demonstrating stereotypically masculine behaviours, such as being more competitive, using dominant body language, maintaining distance from subordinates, using anger as a control mechanism and either attempting to retain control in group situations, or withdrawing from them completely; while females focused on
interpersonal interactions and communication (Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Daley & Naff, 1998; Gibson, 1995; Jewell & Whicker, 1994; Pitner, 1981). Overall, female leaders were typically thought to use an empowering leadership style, rather than exerting power and their goal was directed to the quality of the outcome, rather than winning (Appelbaum & Shapiro, 1993).

However, it has been noted elsewhere that males were more inclined to take on leadership roles than females, but when females accepted the leader’s role they were more likely to adapt their leadership style to meet the needs of the gender of their subordinates (Langford et al, 1998). For example, female leaders believed that female staff needed to be invited into sharing decision making, while male staff were more likely to accept the leader taking control to resolve an issue. The findings from this study supported certain aspects of Langford et al’s conclusions, namely some participants changed their leadership style in line with their relationship with stakeholders. For example, Jill unwillingly changed her style because, “They didn’t let me use my own leadership style” and out of frustration, Eve changed her collaborative approach to a more authoritarian style and asserted, “I don’t think a male principal would have had the same response.” These findings will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Females have been deemed to face a no-win situation when they take on a leadership role, since to be considered a leader, a female must demonstrate assertiveness and assume control, but to do so means she steps outside the perceived stereotypic role of a female (Langford et al, 1998; Schaeff, 1992; Schmuck, 1996). If however, she uses her more natural leadership style of inclusion and communication, others might not perceive those strategies as those of a leader and she would be devalued as a female, attempting to be a leader. Langford et al (1998) claimed the no-win situation was brought about through a circular process. Pressures were placed on females to display normal leadership behaviours, that is, to behave like males, which in turn, caused unnecessary stress, performance pressure and resulted in poor leadership, thus supporting the claim that women cannot be leaders. Schmuck (1996) concluded that females must:
...become abnormal women; they must transcend the social expectations of femaleness in order to aspire to the socially prescribed role of leader. (p 356)

The no-win assessment was supported by Hoyt (2005) who claimed that stereotypic characteristics led people to perceive women as less qualified for leadership roles, but when successful, they were perceived less favourably because their behaviours were inconsistent with expectations of desired female behaviours. Although the leadership literature over recent years has pointed toward the stereotypic female characteristics as being the preferred leadership style, practice continues to adopt the standard masculine values as the norm and organisations continue to be preoccupied with masculine oriented cultures (Collinson, 2005; Elliott & Stead, 2008; Fletcher, 2004).

Irrespective of the steps taken toward equality by women throughout the latter part of the 20th century, traits such as being independent, competitive, task oriented, decisive, dominant, aggressive and autocratic continued to be associated with males, whereas expressive traits such as being helpful, emotional, understanding, sensitive, compassionate and democratic were still associated with females at the end of the 20th and early part of the 21st centuries (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003; Spence and Buckner, 2000; van Engen, van der Leeden & Willemsen, 2001). Following a review of the literature van Engen et al (2001) noted that these findings were consistent across countries such as Australia, Israel, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, South Africa and the West Indies, where the expectation of a leader continued to be a white, middle class, heterosexual male. However, Spence and Buckner (2000) argued that females used masculine traits more frequently than they did in previous years, suggesting that while gender stereotypes prevailed, their strength may have diminished. Conversely, Schaef (1992) asserted the reason may have been because, “Many women believe the only road to success is to act like men and beat them at their own game” (p 47).

Similar observations have been made by other researchers who argued that women have been seduced into masculinising their practices in order to compete in an heroically male leadership world (Ball & Reay, 2000; Binns, 2008; Calas & Smircich, 1991; Linstead & Thomas, 2002; Sinclair, 2007). In this study, the female teaching principals discovered that the masculine leadership style was preferred by many community
members and some were forced to change their leadership style in order to conform. Eve and Jill in particular, changed their styles to suit what they perceived as difficult communities. Eve complained that the community had not allowed her to operate in her preferred collaborative fashion and she had been forced to adopt an autocratic leadership style. Whereas Jill came to the conclusion that a more masculine approach of, “it’s my way or the highway” may have been more successful than her relational efforts with staff. She was ostracised by staff and discovered mid-way through the year that particular members were power brokers in the community. “If power is an inevitable part of the fabric of relationships, it is important to understand how it operates in the leadership context and with what effects” (Binns, 2008, p 602). Jill confirmed that statement when she pronounced at the end of the year that an obstacle for beginning female principals was being unaware who controlled power in the community and recommended finding out prior to commencing as principal. Townley (1994) referred to this insight as having, “...the ability to reflect on the import of one’s actions, stipulating the criteria through which one wants to live and judge practices” (p 167).

More recently, studies have consistently shown that males were assessed as better suited for traditional leadership roles in male dominated settings, such as the military, where they were able to exhibit dominance; while females were rated as more effective in settings that required a high level of compassion and empathy, such as social service organisations (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly et al, 2003; Eagly & Karau, 2002). These findings indicated a relationship between gender and leadership and cultural expectations and suggested that culture played a large part in the way a leader was viewed. When a leader performed in accordance with the gender stereotypic view, leadership was viewed as more effective than one who performed contrary to the accepted beliefs (Campbell, Bommer & Yeo, 1993; Coleman et al, 1998). In an environment governed by patriarchal values, women experienced both covert and overt objections to taking on a leadership role (Coleman et al, 1998).

Accordingly, based on generations of reiterative performance, sex and gender have become accepted as conceptual norms, with the result that historically society’s tasks, roles and responsibilities have been allocated on the basis of gender (Lorber, 1994;
Stelmok & Wilson, 2005). For instance, men and women are encouraged to display their masculinity and femininity in society, by females being pressured to be thin and males to be toned and muscled. Therefore, women are classed as feminine because they act in the culturally prescribed role of “femininity” and men conform to society’s expectations of “masculinity”. “Through generations of this performance, the binaristic categories of sex and gender have settled into our culture as conceptual norms” (Stelmok & Wilson, 2005, p 2).

In the same way that gender is constructed through social interactions, the role of principal has also been socially constructed. “It is this socialized sharing that gives these constructions their apparent reality, for if everyone agrees on something, how can one argue that it does not exist?” (Guba, 1990, p 89). In the instance of school principals, the socially constructed norms of how principals socialise and how they behave are constructed on the assumption that males will populate the role. Thus, females face a complex situation, “How does a woman become identified as ‘in charge’ without also being identified in negative or ‘unfeminine’ ways?” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p 203-204). Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) observed that throughout history women have been seen only as to how they relate to males: “Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself, but as relative to him” (p 16).

This viewpoint is particularly relevant to this research. It raised the question of whether specific expectations regarding gender exist in rural and remote communities and if so, the impact those expectations have on the leadership practices of female beginning teaching principals.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter concentrated on leadership research as it related to the current study. It considered the definitions of leadership from a global perspective and highlighted the interplay of interpersonal skills, such as communication, within the context and culture of the environment. It traced early research, which attempted to identify leaders by characteristics as diverse as physical appearance and personality through to later research which considered behaviour as defining a leader.
The focus of leadership research was subsequently narrowed to school leadership and the characteristics which were attributed to an effective school principal. It considered the changing nature of the principal’s role from running a hierarchically structured bureaucracy, through “the great man” period, to the current technological complexities of the role.

The final section of this chapter considered the impact of gender on leadership and suggested that leaders were viewed through a prism of stereotypic characteristics. In essence, males were reputed to be competitive, aggressive, controlling and ambitious, while females were democratic, flexible and nurturing. However, females were viewed as being in a no-win situation. If they used the stereotypic male leader’s behaviours, they stood the chance of being devalued as a female attempting to emulate a leader, but if they chose their natural collaborative style, those characteristics were not viewed as leadership.

This chapter also highlighted Butler’s (1990) theory which refuted the existence of gender norms and argued that feminine or masculine performances created the ideology of gender. Gender therefore emerges as a reality only to the extent that it is performed. Butler claimed that the roles are established, recreated and reinforced within the performances and it is within the act of performing that gender norms are defined and seen as natural. The way in which gender is performed embodies the social practices that are contextually defined and if behaviour deviated too far from the socially imposed gender standards, society imposed covert punishment. The performance includes how individuals dress, their mannerisms and social interactions, all of which provide clues as to how the culture defines gender roles (Butler, 1990, 2004). Relative to this study, were the performances of individuals within their culturally contextual roles, which pointed toward acceptance or resistance. In other words, this study addressed the social practices in rural and remote small school communities and how those practices defined gendered behaviours. In doing so, the views of the female beginning teaching principals provided a valuable insight into the construction of principal gender within the context of the small rural and remote communities in which these women lived and worked.
The chapter also denoted the gaps in the literature with regard to female leadership in small rural and remote communities. Although Dempsey (1992) conducted significant research into Australian rural and remote cultural perceptions, the data are somewhat dated and do not specifically address school leadership. This study also adds to Dempster’s (2001) investigation into the perception of leadership as espoused by stakeholders, by focusing on perceptions of female leadership. Chapter 6 provides details of interviews with stakeholders prior to the teaching principal commencing at the school and at the conclusion of her first year. Implications will be drawn from the interview data regarding the participants’ perceptions of leadership. Essentially, the context of females in small schools in rural and remote areas is significant, given that so many are led by females, but little research has exclusively focused on them. This study will go some way toward closing that gap.

In order to place this research into perspective, the next chapter will discuss the role of females within Australia and the broader global society. It will consider the path females trod in order to be accepted initially into education and later into school leadership and how female leadership is viewed in small rural and remote locations. This historical and cultural stance will provide a background to the outcomes reported by the twelve female beginning teaching principals who participated in this research.
CHAPTER 3

FEMALE LEADERSHIP

3.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the relevant literature for three of the aims of this research – gender specific issues relating to leadership; the social complexities of living in a rural and remote community for female teaching principals; and the expectations school stakeholders have of female teaching principals. To place this study in context, the chapter will commence with an overview of Queensland female educators within an historical context. As the focus of this research is on living in rural and remote areas, the next section will address the societal and cultural stereotypes of males and females within that context. The following section will address gender leadership differences, followed by a review of the impact these differences have on leaders when they assume the role of principal. The final section will introduce the expectations that stakeholders maintain for females in small school communities and the impact the role has on the confidence levels of female beginning teaching principals.

3.2 Female educators in historical context

Queensland historical records indicate that in 1860 three female teachers were employed in the Queensland state education system, representing 43% of only seven teachers in the state (Clarke, 1985). However, as a result of rapid growth in the school student population by 1900 the percentage had increased to 53% and over the ensuing two decades female teacher numbers grew to represent 61% of all Queensland state school teachers. The next twenty years saw the trend reverse, so that by 1940 females represented just 43% of the teaching population (Clarke, 1985). Little significant growth occurred in female teacher numbers over the ensuing three decades, as they were required to resign when they married and when that regulation relaxed, to resign when they became pregnant. Toward the end of the 1960s, corresponding with the rise of the Women’s Movement, female teaching numbers again increased, so that by 1971 they represented 55%; in 1983, 60% ; in 1995, 64%; and by 2008, 76% of all teachers in the Queensland state school system were females (ABS, 1997; Clarke, 1985; Department
Table 3.1 shows the fluctuating numbers of female teachers in Queensland between 1860 and 2008.

Table 3.1 Percentage of female teachers in Queensland state schools 1860 - 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Female % of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Clarke, 1985; Department Education & Training, 2008a, b

The statistics for female principals in Queensland followed a similar trend to that of female teachers. In 1860 there was just one female principal, equating to 25% of the total four principals in the state, but by 1880 they represented 20% of 345 principals (Clarke, 1985). Notably however, only 25% of principals in schools with staff of one or more teachers were females. Twenty years later, at the turn of the 20th century, 36% of the 28 largest schools in the state employed female principals.

However, at the beginning of the 20th century females were only permitted to be teachers or principals in segregated girls’ schools, while males were principals in mixed schools, staffed all boys’ schools and taught higher grades in mixed schools (Clarke, 1985). Consequently, the majority of females who became principals did so in one teacher schools with student enrolments of less than thirty. By 1902 eleven females were in charge of these small, mixed, one-teacher schools, but they were essentially caretakers, as the principalship passed to a married male when enrolments exceeded thirty students (Clarke, 1985). On the few occasions when a female principal managed a large school with a greater number of staff and student enrolments than her male counterpart, she received a lower salary and was not afforded the same degree of professional or public respect as her male colleagues (Clarke, 1985).
Reflecting a similar trend to female teachers, the next twenty years saw the greatest increase in female principal numbers, so that by 1920 they represented 47% of all Queensland principals. However, after 1920 the number of schools, including one-teacher schools with female principals, declined, culminating in 1940 with females representing just 20% of all principals in Queensland (Clarke, 1985).

During the 1940s and 1950s female teachers spent on average 21 years and in the 1960s and 1970s, 13 years in the classroom, before applying for the principalship, whereas males averaged 5-10 years less time before requesting the same role (Reynolds, 2002). Females were seen to move into “male territory” (p 37) when they became principals and Reynolds claimed they were tolerated, but not necessarily welcomed. They were referred to as “lady principals” (p 38) and generally found support from powerful father figures within the education system. Reynolds argued that those not protected by a father figure donned the mantle of superwoman and were required to juggle work responsibilities with greater efficiency than their male colleagues, as well as home responsibilities far above those of males, without, “dropping any of the balls” (p 38).

Until the mid-1960s the promotional path for female teachers was limited, especially as they were required to resign when they married. The underlying attitude appeared to be that females could not be placed in a position of authority over men and it was socially accepted that only males were capable of leadership. Furthermore, it was believed that females were too gentle to administer discipline; especially to male students and that they could influence older male students to become “sissies” (Clarke, 1985). As mentioned in Chapter 1, females were also not as academically well trained as males, which, coupled with the other reasons listed, resulted in limited acceptance of female principals (Clarke, 1985).

By 1983 the number of female principals had fallen to just 6% of all Queensland state school principals (Clarke, 1985). However, during the 1990s the trend reversed, so that by 1996 females represented 25%; by the commencement of the 21st century, 35%; and by 2007, 46% of Queensland state school principals (MOHRI, 2004; Department Education & Training, 2008a, b). However, an anomaly existed between the number of female principals in primary schools and those in secondary, where they continued to be
outnumbered by males. In 2004 almost 90% of female principals were in primary schools, but by 2007, 48% of primary school principals and 37% of secondary school principals were females (MOHRI, 2004). Despite these promising statistics Wildy and Clarke (2005) cautioned against inferring that females were becoming more readily accepted as principals. They argued that females were more likely to be appointed to small rural and remote schools and that the percentage of females declined as the school size increased. Table 3.2 shows the fluctuations in numbers for female principals in Queensland between 1860 and 2007.

Table 3.2 Percentage of female principals in Queensland state schools 1860-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of total principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Clarke, 1985; Department Education & Training, 2008 a, b

3.3 Why females are less likely to apply for the principalship

One of the reasons proffered for the disparity in principal gender numbers has been the overwhelming workload and subsequent long working hours (Australian Education Union (AEU), 2004; Kochan, Spencer & Mathews, 2000; Lacey, 2004). The AEU (2004) claimed that working almost sixty hours each week to complete the principal’s duties impacted on society’s perceptions of female contributions to family responsibilities, especially if she had young children, or planned on commencing a family. Accordingly, although females were ambitious, males were more likely to seek a career path into senior positions, while females continued to assume primary
responsibility for home affairs and to seek career satisfaction and work/lifestyle balance through other avenues (Bahnsch, 2006; Clark, Caffarella & Ingram, 1999; Lacey, 2004). Similar observations came from McKenzie, Kos, Walker and Hong (2008) who reported that females did not apply for the principalship due to the amount of time the job demanded; wanting to balance their work and personal lives; as well as having a preference for classroom teaching.

The discrepancy between the numbers of female teachers and female principals has been particularly noteworthy, due to the prevalence of female teachers. For instance, in 2008 76% of Queensland’s teachers were females, but only 46% of principals were females (Department of Education & Training, 2008a, b). Similar statistics were forthcoming from other countries. In New Zealand, females represented 82% of teachers in primary schools, but accounted for just 40% of primary school principals (Ministry of Education, 2002). Conversely, this may be stated as 60% of principals were appointed from the 18% pool of males in the schools (Brooking, 2003). Brooking claimed that males continued to be selected as principals in New Zealand, because the perception persisted that males were better disciplinarians and that only males were interested in coaching sports teams. Brooking added that another factor was “local logics” (p 4), an undefined system related to the nature of the local school community, its context and location and as a result, finding a principal, usually a male, who would fit the community. “Local logics” also applied to this study, when a community banded together in an effort to retain a male acting teaching principal and protested to the authorities when a female, Heather, was appointed.

In the United States, where some states reported 70% of teachers were females, only 52% were primary school principals, with family responsibilities given as the reason for not taking on the role (Doud & Keller, 1998; Loder, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1999; Young & McLeod, 2001). Doud and Keller (1998) observed that the majority of female principals in the United States did not become principals until they were in the 40-50 year age group, compared to males who did so in their 20s and 30s. By the time females were in the older age group their children had grown, thereby freeing time to undertake the workload. Further support for this theory came from Eckman’s (2004) study, where it was found that only 24% of the females, but 59% of the male principals’ children still lived at home. Similar statistics were reported from England, where female principals
continued to be less likely to have children at home than male principals (Coleman, 2007).

This assertion found support in this study, where five of the twelve teaching principal participants were parents and all five advised that their children no longer lived at home, which allowed them to undertake an opportunity not previously possible. In fact, in explaining why she had chosen this particular time to undertake the role, one of the participants, Ann, stated, “... my children have left home, so it’s a good time in my life to do this. It’s an adventure, a broadening of life experiences.” The remaining seven participants were under forty years of age and did not have children.

Other researchers have suggested that females have been reluctant to undertake the principal’s role because they preferred to be trained prior to applying for it, in contrast to males, who were willing to develop their skills on the job (Maunder & Warren, 2008; J. Watterston, 2010a). In addition, females were less likely than males to plan their careers; were more inclined to lack confidence in their abilities; and needed encouragement to take on the role, or did so only if forced to do so through special circumstances (Coleman, 2007; Cooke, 2010; Watterston, 2010a). Likewise, Sherman (2005) observed that females tended to follow traditional pathways into leadership and struggled to obtain concrete experiences which would give them credibility, while males were not always required to follow the same path. Sherman added that females were more likely to wait for someone to notice their leadership abilities, while males were more often approached for the role. One of the female participants in Sherman’s study stated, “I get the feeling that men can come in at a higher level and women have to rise through the ranks” (p 727).

Cultural influences have also played a part in preventing, or delaying, females entering the principalship. For instance, in Africa less than 50% of school principals were females, due to the culture of male dominance (Kanjere, 2008; Richard, Peega & Meyers, 2008); in the Netherlands females accounted for just 21% of primary school principals (Kruger, 2008); and in Turkey, males held 92% of the primary school principal roles, despite 67% of teachers being females (Celikten, 2005). These studies indicated that gender may be related to cultural beliefs, which are unconsciously embedded in society’s culture, behaviour and educational structure (Blackmore, 1998; Warrington & Younger, 2006). It is often not until the female principal moves into the
role that she becomes aware of gender specific barriers and by then she may be too entrenched in her own and the community's attitude, to make significant changes (Smith & Hale, 2002). In this study, the interviews with the teaching principals confirmed Smith and Hale's observation - they did not foresee gender barriers prior to undertaking the role. However, at the end of the year they were able to relate stories of personal confrontations, or implied prejudices.

It is worth noting that this study did not set out to present itself as a feminist exposition, but rather, the way gender roles are perceived lies at the root of inequality of the sexes. Butler (1990) argued that if the way society views gender roles is deconstructed there could well be a change in cultural expectations which could improve women’s lives. If there were no longer conventional roles for either gender, it would not be unusual for women to take on the role of school principal, or other authority positions, or for a man to stay at home and care for the children.

*If identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old.*

(Butler, 1990, p 149)

It follows therefore, that the work adults do as mothers and fathers, as employees and employers, shape the individual’s experiences and produce different feelings, relationships and skills. They produce the social construction of gender and gender is one of the major ways human beings organise and function in their lives (Lorber, 1994). Hence, anything that falls outside these gender configurations is seen as pathological, resulting in the marginalisation of the assertive female and the effeminate male (Mistry, 2000). As this study showed, the female teaching principals recognised the need to be assertive, but were uncertain how to proceed as females to establish their authority. Alice, one of the teaching principals, also highlighted that effeminate males would experience difficulties fitting in, because males needed to behave in a stereotypically masculine manner. She observed:
Being a male would help in country areas, with that dominant male culture in country areas. Masculine stereotype men get the respect before they have even done anything. Women have to earn it.

While another teaching principal participant, Ann, acknowledged that she sat on the border of social acceptance purely because her husband worked on one of the properties, “It’s the blokes he works with out there and to them I’m just his wife.” However, as neither she nor her husband were heavy alcohol drinkers, they did not entirely fit with the masculine culture: “They expect him to be a big boozer like them.” So, on the one hand they were accepted because her husband performed “masculine” work on a property, but on the other hand they did not fit because he did not conform to the social expectations of the masculine role of being “a boozer”. Later, when the second female teacher was replaced by an inexperienced male graduate teacher, Ann was surprised by the excitement in the community and the expectations they held for a male teacher regardless of his inexperience:

One parent said they need a male to discipline [the students], but I said ‘no’...Men get more acceptance than women in places like this, the assumption is they will be good.

3.4 Society and cultural stereotypes

As discussed in the previous chapter, males and females have been assigned specific stereotypic characteristics by the society in which they live. As cultural expectations of the genders are a focus in this study, it is worth recapping this aspect of the topic. Historically within Australia, the supposedly instinctive leadership characteristics of males were deemed essential for public administration roles, such as school principal, which in turn maintained the male dominant power structures and afforded females the same nurturing and emotive tasks at school as they were at home (Blackmore, 1993). In the past, the primary purpose of female teachers was to demonstrate moral refinement for students and their male colleagues; with a secondary purpose of imposing middle class values and domestic virtues on the working class students (Blackmore, 1993). Therefore, females who attempted to break into educational leadership roles were considered deviant. Added to this perception was the view that they were inadequate,
because they did not fit the masculine model of educational leadership and were considered asexual for attempting to undertake an established male role (Blackmore, 1993). In other words, the stereotypic role of principal and leader was portrayed as an authoritarian, cane-wielding, married male (D’Arcy, 1995; Michael, 1996).

During the Second World War, with a limited number of men available to fill jobs, females regardless of marital status, entered the workforce and at war’s end, fought to retain their jobs. As a result, society’s expectations and beliefs changed and it became acceptable for females to work after marriage until the birth of children and to return to work when their children commenced school. This pattern continued until the end of the 1960s when, with the introduction of reliable birth control methods, couples were able to plan their families around the female’s work, or career aspirations (Michael, 1996). The resultant large scale entry of females into the workforce brought significant social change, so that post-war their participation in all aspects of the workforce became an accepted part of Australian society and culture (Bahnisch, 2006). Changing the stereotypic view of the male as leader however, was slower, especially in small, isolated communities.

According to Dempsey (1992), only twenty years ago females in small towns were still expected to work in areas that entailed caring for others; providing support services; or utilising domestic skills. They worked as nurses, aides, garment makers, packers, shop assistants or cleaners. In contrast, up to 90% of the male work force was employed in jobs that required the stereotypic masculine traits of physical strength, initiative, leadership and management skills. In his study of rural communities in Australia, Dempsey reported widespread acceptance in some areas, that the male was the provider in the community, while the female was the homemaker, taking care of the children and supporting her husband’s work. One participant in Dempsey’s study responded:

*If she is to fit in [to the community] she must not be too ambitious...It’s OK for her to be the best cake maker because that’s maintaining her feminine role.* (p 178)

Dempsey’s (1992) study implied that females continued to be viewed as inferior to males and while men were seen to be rational and predictable, women were irrational and capricious. Dempsey also came to the same conclusion as Schaef (1992) that ironically, in various small communities, females maintained the patriarchal system by
applying pressure on other females to conform to social mores of being supportive, but subordinate to males. Based on interviews conducted during his study, Dempsey quoted participants as saying:

*You cannot have a stable family life if a woman is working...A woman cannot be a good mother and work.* (p 148)

*Wives should stay home and mind the children. Some of the most disturbed kids in this town are from families where the mother works.* (p 148)

In an effort to understand why females felt threatened by a disruption to society’s values, Cox (1996) claimed:

*...because of the allocated spheres of approved womanhood and limited accepted behaviours, women are often co-opted into being more assiduous gatekeepers for current masculine values than the male guardians themselves.* (p 115)

However, according to Grace (1994), the reason could be found in culturally constructed attitudinal factors. Despite being aware of social changes with regard to females in leadership and decision making roles, some females continued to defer to the philosophical attitudes of the community, which accepted and approved the power and dominance of males. Therefore, females who moved into small school communities with a level of authority and implied leadership, such as a principal, were more likely to meet with resistance from the conservative, male dominated ethos of the community. As Dempsey (1992) found, in communities where those attitudes prevailed, female leaders were perceived as atypical despite their behaviours being considered normal when exhibited by a male (Catalyst, 2007). Speaking from personal experience D’Arcy (1995) described herself as an “alien” (p 210) in a rural community:

*The P&C didn't know how to talk to a female principal. It would appear I was not only a challenge to the dominance of the males in the small community but also to women who had made other, more traditional choices about their lives and careers.* (p 210)

These findings were supported in this study by Heather, one of the teaching principals, who observed:

*I went to the local races and after the races I went to the public bar and it was commented by a female parent I should not be there; whereas a male principal would have been more than welcome.*
Likewise, Warren (2009) observed that a bias against female leaders in the workplace continued to exist, with female leaders being perceived as nurturing and taking care of staff, whereas males were defined as more adroitly taking charge of the staff and the organisation. Similarly, Moreau, Osgood and Halsall (2005) found that a workforce made up predominantly of females, was less likely to be valued by society and proposed that this could be a reason why fewer males became teachers.

These arguments fitted within a socialisation theory which contended that individuals behave according to society’s expectations. Under western civilization’s processes, females have been encouraged to develop characteristics and supporting values that contrast with the competitive, controlling and aggressive leadership styles of males (Grant, 1988; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989). According to this theory, females are destined to be caring and relationship oriented and if they become leaders, to emphasize a team approach, to model expected behaviour and to be more willing to provide positive feedback (Comer, Jolson, Dubinsky & Yammarino, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 1990; Rigg & Sparrow, 1994; Rosener, 1990). On the other hand, by using those characteristics, female leaders were more likely to be viewed as overly emotional, indecisive and sensitive and as a result, their leadership would lack credibility (Valentine and Godkin, 2000).

Socialisation theory conveys a similar philosophy to that of Butler’s (1990) theory of gender and performativity. Butler contended that gender behaviour is the result of both subtle and blatant social coercion and that gender is real only to the extent that it is performed. Therefore, according to Butler, gender is merely a social construction. At the same time Butler (1990) also addressed the tactics of some feminists who perceived men as enemies and oppressors of women and were openly hostile toward them. Butler believed such attitudes were self defeating and only served to widen the gulf between men and women (Young, 1998).

This study demonstrated that men were not necessarily the “enemy” and supported assertions by Dempsey (1992), Grace (1994) and D’Arcy (1995) that it was more likely other females who sought to subjugate the female teaching principals into stereotypical subservient roles.
3.5 Principal leadership and gender differences

Most individuals see gender categorisation as a familiar part of daily life and it is not until their expectation of how men and women should behave is disrupted, that attention is paid to how gender is produced. Gender categorisation commences at birth when individuals tend to treat children differently depending on their sex and eventually children refer to themselves as members of their gender (Lorber, 1994). Throughout the rest of their lives individuals learn what is expected of their gender and act in those ways in social interactions, thereby maintaining the gender order.

The very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands, all at once. (Butler, 1990, p 145)

Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued that individuals are born sexed but not gendered and have to be taught to be masculine or feminine. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature...which is described as feminine” (p 267). This theory suggests that there is no distinct femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, but once gender is ascribed, society constructs and directs individuals to gendered norms and expectations (Lorber, 1994).

Gender signs and signals are so ubiquitous that we usually fail to note them – unless they are missing or ambiguous. Then we are uncomfortable until we have successfully placed the other person in a gender status; otherwise, we feel socially dislocated. (Lorber, 1994, p 1)

This observation goes some way toward explaining the reaction that teaching principal, Heather, experienced when she commenced at the school. The community was familiar with the male who was acting in the role of principal and wanted him to remain, but the department appointed Heather over the community’s wishes. It took considerable time for members of the community to accept her in the role and some failed to do so at all. She was aware that certain community members extended their objections beyond her
being female, to include and possibly justify their censure, as her being too young and inexperienced for the role. Interestingly, there was little difference in ages between Heather and the male acting principal and Heather was a more experienced teacher. Eventually, as a result of community reaction, Heather determined that being a principal required more confidence than she expected and led her to question her ambition to be a principal in a larger school. Several studies have suggested that confidence is an attribute more likely to be possessed by males than females (Hoyt, 2005; Kruger, 2008; McMurtrie, 1997; Smith & Hale, 2002; Stelter, 2002), which could lead to the argument that Heather was “doing” gender.

In the same way, the reason behind another teaching principal, Natalie’s, acceptance into the community raises certain questions. It is not known whether the previous female teaching principal was accepted by the community and if so, did Natalie demonstrate similar behaviours, or was she in contrast to the previous principal? The other possibility was that Natalie commenced a relationship with a local man, whom she married in her second year at the school. Was Natalie therefore “doing” gender by staying within society’s expectations of becoming a wife?

Because the construction of gender occurs through informal and social interactions, patterns of dominance and submission are created and reinforced, thereby strengthening the social norms of femininity and masculinity (Lester, 2008). Meanwhile, Lorber (1994) argued that it does not matter what men and women do, or if they do the same thing, “The social institution of gender insists only that what they do is perceived as different” (p 5). This study raised questions regarding the validity of that statement in relation to the differences in perceptions of the genders in urban and rural areas. For instance, teaching principal Nina remarked that in cities being a female principal would not have caused as many confrontations as it did in the country, where there were more traditional roles for males and females. Similarly, Alice observed that when she visited family and socialised in the city, there was less reaction to her being a principal than there was in country areas. Historically, men and women have often been given different job titles, despite doing the same tasks (Reskin, 1988; Rubin, 1975). These observations raised the question of whether the title of principal was too authoritative for females in some rural areas and if they had been given a lesser designation would they have met the same resistance.
While this study did not seek to compare female and male principal leadership practices, or to examine the exercise of power within the leadership context, comparisons of perceived qualities are inevitable.

Extensive research has been conducted into the differences between female and male school principals, the findings of which have suggested that females were concerned with student achievement, teacher productivity and the social development of the students; while male principals were more involved in political activities and networking for their careers (Nogay & Beebe, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1989). Females were also seen to carry out more educational activities; were more focused on instruction and education; concentrated on creating a positive school culture and learning atmosphere; and rewarded teachers more often than males (Collard, 2001, 2002, 2003; Kruger, 1997, 1999, 2008; Kruger, Witziers & Sleegers, 2007). On the other hand, male principals tended to spend more time on administrative tasks and external contacts than did their female counterparts (Kruger et al, 2007). This is not to suggest that males are ineffective or incompetent as principals, but rather that socio-cultural influences impact on behaviours and the perceptions of those behaviours. The point this thesis makes is that historically females have been denied the opportunity to perform in leadership roles and therefore gender differences are noteworthy.

In an investigation into leadership and gender in Victoria, Australia, Collard (2001, 2003) found that females were more aware of individual differences and difficulties for staff and students and held higher expectations of students’ abilities than males. In addition, female principals were more committed to collegiality and teamwork than males and more willing to share decision making and listen to advice from others; whereas male principals believed that teachers expected and accepted directive leadership. According to Collard, although gender differences in principals were evident, they should not be regarded as “solitary and unilateral influences” (p 352). Collard concluded that while there were significant differences in the perception of male and female principals, factors such as school size, culture and student gender, contributed to the differences. He proposed that principal gender was only one variable in a range of variables contributing to successful school leadership.

Further evidence regarding perceptions of gender differences came from a Canadian study which focused on four female principals (Fennell, 1999). One of the participants
indicated that she needed to be particularly sensitive to the perceptions of parents given that she was young, energetic and female and was aware these characteristics could be perceived as a threat. It is worth noting that of the twelve female beginning teaching principals in this study, five were aged between twenty and thirty years and four between fifty-one and sixty; four had between one and five years teaching experience and three between six and ten years experience.

Burns (2006) also addressed whether age and experience played a part in the expectations beginning teachers had of female principals and found that character, rather than gender, was more relevant. In contrast however, more experienced female teachers and principals’ supervisors noted that establishing and maintaining relationships was an essential component for the principalship and that older, experienced females were more likely to exhibit that skill than younger, less experienced females and more so than males, simply through cultural socialisation. Burns went on to note that communication was an essential ingredient in building relationships.

### 3.5.1 Differences in gender communication

The difference in the way males and females communicate has been attributed to females valuing relationships as part of their culture, but males placing higher priorities on other areas (Barth, 1990; Blenky, Clinchy, & Mattuck, 1986; Haslett, Geis & Carter, 1992; Helgesen, 1990). Helgesen argued that the use of language in communication set females apart from males and claimed that a key component of communication was listening. Females tended to value listening as a means of encouraging others to feel comfortable and emotionally strong, while listening was not a natural male inclination. Likewise, female leaders tended to use communication to establish rapport, avoid isolation and retain a sense of intimacy; whereas males were more likely to use it as a way of maintaining the hierarchical structure and as part of their ongoing struggle to avoid failure, but at the same time preserve their independence (Tannen 1990).

Meanwhile, Ozga (1993) claimed that female principals used less intimidating verbal language and less dominating body language than their male counterparts. Others claimed that female principals used communication to motivate and to demonstrate
caring; to create a safe, orderly and quiet environment; and to include stakeholders in
decision making; but unlike males, were less inclined to use language to emphasize
their own achievements, or to inflame a situation (Bligh & Kohles, 2008; Jones, 1999;
Shakeshaft, 1999; Tannen, 1995).

The importance of communication was emphasised in this study by both the teaching
principal participants and the stakeholders. As will be outlined in later chapters of this
thesis, communication was viewed as an essential element in small school leadership by
both cohorts.

As noted earlier, males have been perceived to use more intimidating verbal and non-
verbal language than females, to demonstrate their authority and power (Ozga, 1993).
Accordingly, history insinuates that male principals were automatically granted power
through a patriarchal social system, but females gained power by virtue of attaining
higher positions in the bureaucratic system (Blackmore, 1999; Haase, 2007; Sinclair,
1998). It follows therefore, that although fewer males entered the teaching profession,
the accepted belief was that a male demonstrated greater power and control over
students and staff than a female and was therefore a better choice for a school principal
(Sherman, 2000).

### 3.5.2 Leadership power and control

Throughout history males have dominated powerful social roles such as politics, law
and the military and in the process established a male leader prototype, which linked
males with power and its inherent authority. It followed, therefore, that female leaders
would meet with negative reactions when they attempted to challenge the natural order
of things, that is, of men being in control (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Rudman &
Kilianski argued, “...powerful women may be disliked for breaching an expectancy that
men are natural leaders” (p 1316). Based on earlier studies, Snodgrass (1992) stated
that females modified their stereotypic characteristics to resemble males as they moved
into positions of power, to present a more powerful impression.

Furthermore, power can be exhibited through language. For instance, Shakeshaft (1995)
claimed that females tended to emphasise “power with” (p 12) stakeholders, rather than
the masculine use of “power over” (p 12); while Sherman (2000) claimed that males
have a level of control and authority based not only on “power over”, but also “fear of”
not associated with females. Others emphasised the social and relational aspects of, “doing gender” and “doing power”, at the same time as, “doing leadership” (Binns, 2008, p 604; Fletcher, 2004). According to Binns (2008), masculine heroic leadership is the dominant form of leadership and is the standard against which all leaders are measured. Blackmore (1989) added:

> Educational leaders display attributes and behaviours...which are generally associated with “masculinity”. It is a view which has effectively displaced women in educational thought, and therefore rendered women invisible in administrative practice. (p 94)

Likewise, commenting about the unequal numbers of male and female superintendents in US schools, Bell (1988) stated:

> Given a general cultural preference for male leaders in our society... the tradition of male leadership in schools, and the predominantly male membership of school boards, the most persuasive characteristic a candidate for superintendent could possess seems to be maleness...Maleness signifies to board members... shared language and experience, predictability, connection with the power structure and leadership that satisfies stereotyped preferences. (p 50)

Conversely, based on her study of principals in Holland, Kruger (1997) determined that females did not differ from males in their perception or use of power and there was no difference in terms of personnel management, internal communication, or “task orientation” (p 454). Similarly, others such as Jirasinghe and Lyons (1996) and Fillion (1997) observed no differences in characteristics between males and females in positions of authority, or in their use of directive leadership. Despite their finding, Jirasinghe and Lyons (1996) added that the result was in contrast to the population overall, where directive leadership was more widespread among males than among females.

Essentially, the consistent agreement in the literature is that for a female to be successful in an institutional hierarchy, such as education, she must perform in a different way to that normally expected of a traditional female (Ball & Reay, 2000; Sherman, 2000; Tseelon, 1995). One method a female may use to achieve the
transformation and gain promotion is to find a male mentor from within the senior ranks of the organisation to model the accepted behaviour (Ball & Reay, 2000). However, altering the perceived role of a female in a small community may not be so simply rectified and as witnessed in this research, the opportunity for mentoring is not always available.

3.6 Female principals in small school communities

As has been noted, it can be challenging for females to undertake leadership roles in rural and remote environments where old attitudes to leadership are preserved and encouraged (Dempsey, 1992; Russell, 1999; Sherman, 2000). Schools tend to reflect the society in which they exist and in small isolated rural and remote school communities the male stereotypic characteristics have historically been viewed as typical and essential.

Despite females working alongside their male partners, generations of beliefs regarding male dominance instilled a belief that discipline and order were born from strength of character and strength was an inherent male characteristic (Sherman, 2000). In contrast to the traditional stereotypic male leader, who was applauded for being task orientated, objective, independent and aggressive, female leaders were seen to emphasise the value of relationships and to provide a nurturing environment, (Sherman, 2000). It has therefore proven more difficult for female principals to participate in a male dominated culture when the community dictated that being a principal was at variance with their concept of femininity because being a leader equated with being aggressive, confrontational and related to a male agenda (Giles, 1995; Michael, 1996). As Sachs and Blackmore (1998) pointed out, negative connotations of being bossy were affixed to females who exhibited masculine behaviours, but there was no such label for males exhibiting the same behaviours.

Recent studies have indicated that female small school principals were more likely to be accepted if their personal values matched the community, or if the community’s values were not opposed and if their leadership style was inclusive, collaborative and served the needs of others; whereas males tended to be accepted even if they opposed the
conventional norms (Bjork, 2000; Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1999; Wallin & Sackney, 2003). After investigating the challenges faced by female principals in small school communities, Duncan and Seguin (2002) observed:

*Outsiders are just not accepted in small towns... For an outsider to be accepted in that school, she would have to be very similar in views and behaviors to those who live in the community.* (p 628)

Moreover, in small communities, principals quickly discovered that anonymity was not an option and an individual’s values were quickly evaluated after only a brief period of grace. Although some female principals were accepted into leadership roles without too much dissent, Wallin and Sackney (2003) observed that in some areas a female principal needed to be, “twice as good a female principal to be half as good as a male principal” (p 5). One principal in Wallin and Sackney’s study commented:

*I’m thinking education needs to pay more than just lip service to gender equity, but I don’t think that it is. I don’t know that the public...the rural public...the farming public...and the generational view of women in the workplace is there in general... It’s still the Boys’ Club, with the occasional woman fitting in for whatever reason. Whatever novel reason it may be. I don’t feel slighted by it; it’s the way it is.* (p 5)

The outcome of Duncan and Seguin’s (2002) and Wallin and Sackney’s (2003) research was supported by Kanjere’s (2008) African study of twenty-one female school principals in rural communities. They identified seven specific challenges: (1) convincing males in the schools and communities that they were capable of leading; (2) being scrutinized for what they wore; (3) male students associating discipline with physical strength and undermining their authority; (4) male teachers rebelling against female authority; (5) female staff not supporting a female principal; (6) parents being less involved in a school with a female principal; and (7) their contribution to the school and society not being regarded as important.

However, these findings were challenged by a study of beginning teaching principals in small school communities in Western Australia (Wildy, 2004). Wildy reported that although the communities usually preferred the principal to be a young male with a family, it was more often the preparedness of the individual to immerse him/herself in the local culture and take an active role in the community that influenced acceptance. One of the female principals in Wildy’s study had few expectations of herself, was not
interested in taking a role in the community, did not form collegial networks and did not participate in local activities. Another female, despite having career ambitions, was not prepared for the complexities of the community and did not participate in its activities. Neither principal was rated as successful by school stakeholders. A similar observation was made about Nan, one of the teaching principals in this study. Although she was considered friendly and polite, she did not immerse herself in the community and was therefore not perceived as part of it.

Stakeholders’ perceptions and expectations can influence the performance and outcome of the principal’s experience, despite different expectations being held for female principals and a lower tolerance for female error (Dempster, 2001; Smith & Hale, 2002; Sungaila, 1982; Tallerico, 2000; B. Watterston, 2010b; Wildy, 2004). The expectations that small school stakeholders, in this study, held for female teaching principals are outlined in Chapter 6.

3.6.1 Stakeholders’ expectations of female principals

One of the stereotypic expectations of females is that they will be nurturing, caring and supportive, therefore, when confronted with a staff member who is not performing satisfactorily, female principals face an additional challenge (Sungaila, 1982). Sungaila stated that society expected female principals to base their decisions for action in, “…the soft-hearted effulgence of feminine compassion, not any hard-headed evaluation of competence” (p 98). Moreover, female principals were allowed few errors and were required to demonstrate constantly they could cope (Sungaila, 1982). Twenty years later little had changed, with the higher turnover of female principals to male principals being attributed to the extreme expectations placed on them, in contrast to those placed on males (Smith & Hale, 2002; Tallerico, 2000;). In comments reflecting those made by Sungaila, Tallerico, noted that fewer allowances were made for female errors and reasoned that society was accustomed to male leaders and therefore perceived them as default leaders. Accordingly, greater tolerance and forgiveness was created for behaviour that would be viewed more negatively if exhibited by a female (B. Watterston, 2010b).

Other researchers reported that students’ parents and some staff assumed that female principals would be easier to intimidate than male principals and students viewed
females as easier to manipulate (Smith & Hale, 2002). Noteworthy in Smith and Hale’s research and reminiscent of Dempsey (1992) and Schaef (1992), was the finding that the greatest resistance toward female principals came from other females, rather than from males. That conclusion found a level of support in this research when some teaching principals reported more confrontational incidences with other females, than with males. For instance, in discussing the incident mentioned earlier regarding being criticised for drinking at the local hotel after the races, Heather stated:

Men accepted me fine. Women, who I thought would accept me, didn’t. I thought it would be the opposite. Men were quite comfortable with my making decisions...they accepted every decision...as soon as I went back to teacher role they were good.

Similar observations regarding lack of acceptance of female principals by other females were earlier reported by Sinclair (1998) and later by Celikten (2005). During interviews with school principals and staff to investigate reasons behind the particularly low numbers of female principals in Turkey, Celikten (2005) found common ground existed between female teachers and female principals. Female teachers reported that female principals were prejudiced, capricious, difficult to work with, and “talked about what you wear and what you do” (p 217). In turn, female principals perceived jealousy and envy based on their being more successful, self confident and conscious of their appearance. Female principals expressed the opinion that female teachers believed in male superiority and therefore perceived certain behaviours as excellent when employed by a male, but objectionable when employed by a female. Celikten asserted:

Male teachers can accept women principals more easily than women... women teachers usually have the feeling that there should be a male figure at the top of everything and they think having a man there is better. (p 217)

Celikten’s (2005) findings were consistent with an Australian study that found female principals’ clothing, physical appearance and bodies were assessed by some staff and community members as evidence of a lack of natural male qualities of authority and power (Wilkinson, 2002). One female principal in Wilkinson’s study commented that she believed parents felt threatened by a female principal and she therefore tended to dress non-threateningly in a sexually neutral style. The same principal drew attention to the differences between urban and rural expectations in the matter of personal presentation. For instance, in a rural school she was conscious not to “power” (p 6)
dress; the underlying message being that she may have power, but not to flaunt it. This message was not sent to male principals. However, another principal refused to hide her gender and instead wore feminine clothes, high heels, long hair, makeup, etc. The second principal was younger than the first and more inclined to challenge the stereotypic expectations of those around her. It could be inferred from these two isolated instances that age and personality contributed to their actions. Wilkinson concluded by arguing:

_Such focus upon gender, class, ethnicity and age suggests that leadership in the education sectors may be potentially constructed on the basis of an implicit authority which is not only male, but middle-aged, middle-class and Anglo-Australian._ (p 3)

As observed through Wilkinson’s (2002) and Wildy’s (2004) studies, stakeholders’ expectations have the potential to impact on the behaviour and success of a female principal. Individuals’ reactions tend to be based on their gender expectations and leaders frequently respond by behaving in line with those expectations (Eagly, Wood and Dickman, 2000). One of the female principals in Wilkinson’s study conformed to expectations that she not “flaunt” her power, while two of the principals in Wildy’s study did not conform. They did not participate in the community and as such were not evaluated as successful by stakeholders. According to socialisation theory, school principals may also internalize their own beliefs about gender roles, guiding them to act out their leadership behaviour (Eagly et al, 2003). This was demonstrated by the second principal in Wilkinson’s (2002) study.

For these reasons, despite one female principal being successful in a particular community, it does not mean her successors will experience the same fortune. In the interviews at the beginning of the year in this study, the teaching principals assumed they would be accepted by the community simply because the previous principal was also a female. However, regardless of the value placed on her predecessor the new principal could be perceived as unsuitable if she acted outside the expected stereotype, or if she deviated from the specific community expectations of how a female should behave (Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Forsyth, Heiney & Wright, 1997). Moreover, although stakeholders may not overtly remark on their need for a male principal, it could be expressed through their non-verbal communication (Sherman, 2000). As will
be shown in later chapters, the anticipation of acceptance by the teaching principals was not necessarily forthcoming from some school stakeholders.

Faced with the challenges outlined here of expectations; of the perception of male dominance, power and control; of living in an unfamiliar location often in an environment of non-acceptance; coupled with the not inconsequential workload, for which limited training is provided, maintaining a level of self-confidence is essential. However, studies have indicated that females demonstrate a lack of confidence in applying for the role of principal. They often do not plan a career path, but wait until someone encourages them to apply, or until they are thoroughly trained for the role (Coleman, 2004, 2007; Cooke, 2010; Kift, 2004; Maunder & Warren, 2008; J. Watterston, 2010a). In a New South Wales study of beginning female principals, one participant explained why she delayed applying for the principalship, “Being a female, I didn’t see myself as having the skills to become a principal” (McMurtrie, 1997, p 14). Another principal in McMurtrie’s study observed that early in her career she did not have the confidence to assume the role of leader and it took a former male principal to convince her otherwise.

A decade later, Coleman (2007) asserted that females continued to lack confidence in their abilities and delayed applying for the principalship until they were certain they could successfully undertake the duties:

> Women tend to be more lacking in confidence than their male counterparts. Men on the whole will apply for a job without having all the necessary examples of qualities that the job states. Women are much more hesitant to put themselves forward without having most, if not all, of the qualities that the job has asked for. (p 8)

The female beginning teaching principals in this study confirmed those earlier findings. At the beginning of the year they expressed a lack of confidence in their abilities to perform certain aspects of the role and at the end of the year reported not being prepared for the level of confidence required and that it faltered throughout the year.
3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on a pivotal component of this study, that of female principals in leadership roles in small school communities. It commenced by looking at the role of female educators within an historical context from 1860, when just three female teachers were employed in state schools in Queensland, through to 2008 when 76% of 36,000 full time equivalent teachers and 46% of all principals were females (Clarke, 1985; Department of Education & Training, 2008a).

It highlighted that leadership roles in education have historically been held by males, so that female representation in school principal roles has not been proportional to their numbers in education. This was followed by a consideration of cultural stereotyping, particularly within small rural and remote communities where males were perceived to be tough, stoic and aggressive and therefore natural leaders. On the other hand, females were rated as emotional, irrational and subservient to males in the workforce and at home and those who sought to become leaders were seen to be usurping the male role in life.

The chapter went on to discuss gender leadership in terms of communication, language and power and control. The use of language was seen to reflect perceptions of power, for example, females emphasized “power with” and males “power over” through their communication styles (Shakeshaft, 1995; Sherman, 2000). While Butler (1990) argued that as gender and leadership norms determine how leaders see themselves and their relationships with others, leaders need to be more fluid and ambivalent, moving between masculine and feminine modes of leadership (Linstead & Thomas, 2002). In keeping with the tenet of this study, the chapter continued by outlining stakeholders’ expectations of female principals in comparison to those of males and acknowledged the reduced allowance made for female error.

The chapter concluded with an overview of the lack of confidence that females exhibited in applying for the role of principal in contrast to males (Maunder & Warren, 2008; McCulla, 2011; J. Watterston, 2010a).

From the review of the literature it has become apparent that there is a scarcity of research specifically targeting female teaching principals and even less so, for neophyte
female teaching principals in rural and remote small schools. By ignoring gender differences within the context of school size and location, newly appointed female teaching principals do not have the benefit of findings specific to their idiosyncratic needs and must therefore accept generalized findings as fact.

The following chapter continues the literature review, by examining the issues faced firstly by beginning principals and secondly, by teaching principals. The chapter will consider the specific challenges of the role, the training received and the unique circumstances which impact on females as they commence their careers as teaching principals.
CHAPTER 4
BEGINNING PRINCIPALS, TEACHING PRINCIPALS AND SMALL SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

4.1 Introduction

One of the aims of this study was to understand the social complexities faced by female beginning teaching principals in small school communities. In order to do that, it is essential to understand the challenges of being a beginning principal and how those challenges are multiplied by being a teaching principal in a small school community. This chapter will therefore address the literature relating to the issues implicit in being a beginning principal, regardless of school size, followed by a review of the added elements germane to being a teaching principal. The final section of the chapter will provide a brief overview of the stakeholders in small school communities and the cultures that pervade them.

4.2 Beginning Principals

4.2.1 Setting the scene

A cursory examination of any library catalogue or education journal will attest that assistance and guidance relating to leadership skills is available to beginning principals of any school size, from experienced practitioners and academics (Brock & Grady, 2002, 2004; Dubrin & Dalglish, 2003; Grady, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Kellerman, 2004; McEwan, 2003; Murphy & Lewis, 2001; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005; Simpson, 2003). The recommendations from these and other sources included making students the first priority; trusting the staff and letting them know their input and knowledge about the school, community and culture was valued, by listening and asking questions to understand why the school operated as it did; and having a thorough understanding of curriculum (Alvy & Robbins, 2005; Brewster & Klump, 2005; Gurr, Drysdale, Swann, Doherty, Ford & Goode, 2006; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Sinclair, 2002). According to Sinclair (2002, p 31), in addition to all that, the new principal needed to, “...be seen everywhere”, from the front gate in the morning greeting students
and parents, to having a presence in every classroom every day. Being seen around the school increased the chance of acceptance and signified a willingness to interact with all stakeholders. For this reason, a considerable amount of literature intended for beginning principals related to the significance of building positive relationships with school stakeholders (Jentz & Murphy, 2005; Petzko, 2008; Walker et al, 2003).

In addition to this daunting list of skills, new principals are also faced with theirs and stakeholders’ expectations that they will immediately do everything well and have a thorough knowledge and expertise from the first day in the role (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Hewitson, 1995; Thomas & Hornsey, 1991). Stakeholders also expect that beginning school principals will have well developed communication, managerial and leadership skills and a strong education and curriculum focus, regardless of whether the school was in an urban, rural or remote location (Campbell, 1999; O’Mahony & Matthews, 2003). O’Mahony and Matthews claimed beginning principals were hampered by “trying to learn everything at once while also expected to be experts in everything” (p 8) and that beginning principals were “living life in a goldfish bowl, being constantly scrutinized, observed and judged” (p 12). Hewitson (1995) asserted:

*At the very least, the beginning principal’s expertise is thus expected to encompass a clear understanding of the role, appropriate exercise of position power, maintenance or establishment of professional relationships and maintenance or establishment of processes and structures designed to facilitate goal achievement. (p 20)*

Meanwhile, LeGore and Parker (1997) emphasised that acceptance of the new principal was compounded by a range of circumstances, including the existing culture of the school; community acceptance of new comers; and gender expectations. These factors were relevant to this current study, as each impacted on the experiences of the twelve female beginning teaching principals central to this research.

### 4.2.2 Challenges for beginning principals

Beginning principals in Victoria and New South Wales reported that the major challenges they faced were the administrative overload, lack of clerical assistance, staff issues and unrealistic expectations from the community (Mallia, 1992; Thomas & Hornsey, 1991). Mallia also reported that beginning principals in Victoria were
unprepared for the involvement of parents, especially in small schools, along with the amount of time spent in community liaison and negotiation and the need to build relationships with and between staff.

Likewise, following his own experiences as a beginning principal in Australia, Quong (2006) identified five challenge areas in his first year, all of which aligned with issues reported to him by six other beginning principals. The issues included improving student behaviour; conflict with and between staff; parent complaints; achieving academic results; and ensuring student enrolment and attendance remained constant. Upon reflection, he noted that, born out of enthusiasm, he attempted to introduce change too quickly. In the process he alienated some staff and lost their support. Quong’s assessment of his first year concluded with the opinion, “Achieving a balance between doing too much and too little is the beginning principal’s most stressful dilemma” (p 383, emphasis included in the original).

Similar observations were previously noted by Thomas (1987), who researched challenges for beginning principals in Australian schools and found they were threefold – establishing credibility; the impact of rumour; and the speed and timing of introducing change. Relevant to this current research was a principal’s comment in Thomas’s study, that credibility in country schools was particularly important, as small school communities tended to exhibit an intense interest in their schools. Consequently, it was essential to establish good relationships within the community and to demonstrate a responsible and confident administrative style. As will be shown in the following chapters, these comments were reflected in interviews with the female beginning teaching principals in this study. For instance, Sally discovered that she initially lost credibility in the community when she “gutted” the school, throwing out accumulated “stuff” without consulting them. She eventually repaired the relationships but it took time to do so.

According to Louis (1980) and Schein (1974), beginning principals undertook a three stage process to establish relationships with the community. They commenced with the anticipatory socialisation stage which was marked by looking forward to the new challenges, but at the same time being tinged with anxiety about the unknown. They moved on to the encounter stage where they established routines and habits which
signified the way they intended to proceed; before moving into the final, insider stage, when staff and the community demonstrated their acceptance and the principal felt comfortable in the role. These stages were verified by the beginning principals in this study. During the interviews at the beginning of the first year they commented on their excitement at the prospect of meeting new challenges, that is, the anticipatory stage; whereas during the interviews at the end of their first year, stories related to the encounter stage and their attempts to establish new routines with varying levels of success; and finally, the difficulties they confronted as they tried to enter the insider stage. Some participants in this study experienced difficulty at the encounter stage, while several participants expressed the belief that they never reached the insider stage.

Meanwhile, early debate centred on the priority beginning principals needed to give the skills deemed critical to successful school leadership (Daresh & Playko, 1994; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Katz and Kahn argued that the new principal needed to concentrate on job related technical skills, while Daresh and Playko contended that an effective new principal needed to focus on finding methods which would bring the school community together. While they did not seek to minimise the value of technical skills, Daresh and Playko stated that building self confidence, understanding the school culture and developing a personal vision of leadership was essential to the new principal’s effectiveness. This contention was supported in later research by teachers and principals with more than five years experience. They rated the principal’s humanistic skills, such as the ability to empathise, more highly than other skills and they regarded effective communication, openness to divergent viewpoints and the ability to talk to school stakeholders, as paramount for a school principal (Brewster & Klump, 2005; Mulford & Johns, 2004). Conversely, aspiring principals with no experience rated technical skills as most important (Daresh and Arrowsmith, 2003). That point was substantiated in this research when prior to taking on the role, the beginning principals expressed a perceived challenge to be their lack of general administrative ability; whereas at the end of the year, they rated socialising skills as crucial for a beginning principal. They found establishing relationships while maintaining professionalism, particularly stressful.

Other challenges for beginning principals have been identified as adjusting to a series of firsts all at the same time, including establishing relationships with stakeholders;
understanding the culture; resolving conflict; creating credibility; and managing the administrative demands with little or no training (O’Mahony & Matthews, 2003). Moreover, the challenges are magnified by having to cope with loneliness and a sense of isolation (Hobson, Brown, Ashby, Keys, Sharp & Benefield, 2003; Lashway, 2003; Tuck, 2009; Walker et al, 2003).

Compounding the challenges for more recent beginning principals, is that they tend to have less life and classroom experience than those in the past, given the trend toward entering the principalship at a younger age (New Leaders Assistance Service, 2002). That was evidenced in this research, where five of the twelve teaching principals were aged between twenty and thirty years of age; four had five years or less teaching experience; and seven had taught for less than ten years. These younger, less experienced principals are expected to meet the demands of a changing world where parents seek more involvement in their children’s education; financial accountability is more public; funding is less available; departmental regulations are more demanding; and the school curriculum is constantly evolving (New Leaders Assistance Service, 2002). These issues have been cited as the reasons behind 19% of beginning principals in the United States leaving the principalship after only one year in the role (New Leaders Assistance Service, 2002); 45% of teaching principals in one region in Queensland either resigning or relinquishing their principal’s role in a one year period (Lester, 2001); and less than 50% of principals in New Zealand planning to be in the role for more than five years (Wylie, 1999). Barnett and Shohe (2005) made the point that it was during the first two years as principal that they developed the confidence to continue in the role, returned to classroom teaching, or left education completely.

Given the duties and responsibilities of a principal, it is worth repeating that within the Queensland state education system there is no requirement for formal qualifications in order to be appointed as principal. In addition, there is no mandatory number of years’ classroom teaching experience prior to entering the role. Becoming a primary school principal therefore frequently commences by undertaking the role of a teaching principal in a small rural or remote school (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Graham, Miller & Paterson, 2009).
4.3 Teaching Principals

4.3.1 The teaching principal in context

As discussed in Chapter 1, schools within Education Queensland’s state school system are rated, or “banded” according to school size, enrolments, location, etc. The smallest size schools are Bands 5 and 6 and are the focus of this study. In many Band 5 schools there are fewer than 26 students, resulting in the teaching principal being the only teacher in the school. They are therefore responsible for the administrative aspects of the principal’s role and community liaison, as well as teaching all students, from preparatory (prep) year to year seven. In this research, nine of the schools were classified as Band 5 and three as Band 6.

As illustrated in the previous section, the principalship is a demanding and time consuming role. However, much of the early research regarding principals focused on non-teaching principals in medium to large size schools and concentrated on matters relevant to schools within that context. The assumption was that the duties and responsibilities of a small school principal, with fewer students and staff, were similar, or even less demanding, than their larger school colleagues (Murdoch & Schiller, 2002). More recently, researchers have recognized the unique challenges faced by teaching principals with the dual responsibilities of teaching, along with the same administrative accountability as their larger school colleagues (Armstrong, 2002; Clarke, 2002a, b, c & 2003; Clarke & Wildy, 2004, 2011; Law & Glover, 2000; Lester, 2001, 2003; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Starr & White, 2008). Starr and White argued that unlike their metropolitan counterparts, principals of small rural schools needed to juggle the demanding task of teaching multi age groups of students with the administrative workload, with limited onsite support, as non-teaching staff were part time employees whose hours were determined by student enrolments. Despite these restrictions, state and district level systems anticipated the same response times to their standardised compliance requirements, irrespective of size or geographic location of the school. Following their investigation into the challenges faced by principals in rural schools in Victoria, Starr and White (2008) concluded: “The demands of life in small rural communities create unconventional circumstances for principals” (p. 3).
Chapter 4 Beginning principals, teaching principals

Essentially, the teaching principal is faced with not only providing strong leadership; working collaboratively with stakeholders; being responsible for all decisions made within the school; and being responsive to the needs and expectations of the community; but also producing positive student outcomes (Wildy & Louden, 2000). They face these issues without relevant training or knowledge of small school culture; face an overwhelming workload; and confront issues of acceptance in an unfamiliar environment isolated from their peers (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Clarke, 2003; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; O’Mahony, 2003; Patterson, Koenigs, Mohn & Rasmussen, 2006).

Added to these challenges, is that the often non-appealing geographic nature of small schools attracts young, inexperienced teachers seeking career advancement (Graham et al, 2009). In addition to having little or no leadership practice, they often have limited classroom or life experiences, but are expected to deal with all the issues mentioned, as well as manage the demands of a significant workload (Wylie, 1997).

4.3.2 Workload

Internationally, the consensus is that the role of teaching principal is a complex and multi-faceted one (Armstrong, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Howley & Pendarvis, 2002; Lester, 2001; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Wilson & McPake, 1998; Wylie, 1997). While it is generally understood that school principals deal with issues directly related to children, education, staff and local communities, Armstrong (2002) made the point that teaching principals deal with all that and more. They become involved in finding money in a tight budget; negotiating with building contractors; unblocking toilets; placating community members; avoiding local gossip and family disputes; keeping up with curriculum and departmental initiatives; frequently taking on the unofficial role of groundskeeper and administrative assistant; managing in outdated office spaces, with inadequate telecommunication equipment; as well as teaching; and attempting to maintain a life and relationships outside the school environment. Clarke and Stevens (2006) cautioned that the isolation of small schools required that teaching principals have a greater repertoire of skills than their urban colleagues in order to deal with the variety of situations that confront them. This assertion was confirmed by departmental documents from Education Queensland, which perceived teaching principals to be
leaders in curriculum, management, personnel, community partnerships, change, student outcomes and accountability (Education Queensland, 1999; Logan, 1998).

The frustration for many teaching principals has come about from greater administrative responsibility devolving to schools, increasing the complexity of their role and taking precedence over their core business of teaching and learning (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Lester, 2001; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002). The split between classroom commitments and administrative demands led to one principal stating:

_The most difficult part of my role as a teaching principal is juggling well the role of administrator with its demands with that of a teacher...there often isn’t enough (time) in a day to do each the kind of justice they require._ (Hewitson, 1995, p 29)

In Queensland, a survey of teaching principals revealed that 50% spent as many as ten hours at weekends attending to schoolwork, while a further 40% claimed they worked an additional 20 - 40 hours each week (Clarke, 2003). The results indicated that 98% continued to attend work even when they were ill and more than 80% completed schoolwork if they took sick leave. Regardless of the mandated eight days per semester for administrative duties, 40% of the respondents in Clarke’s study reported they spent 10 – 20 hours each week taking care of administrative and managerial work and more than 70% reported that their non-contact time, intended for class preparation, was spent dealing with administrative tasks. Clarke’s findings were consistent with those of the New South Wales Teachers Federation, which reported that teaching principals worked close to 61 hours per week (Murdoch & Schiller, 2002). More recently, teaching principals in Victoria expressed frustration about the continued increase in bureaucratic demands which impacted on the nature of their role and controlled their work, but was considered time consuming, unrelated to school priorities and took them away from teaching students (Starr & White, 2008).

Research into the workload of teaching principals has not been restricted to Australia. In England, there were claims of increasing pressure to cope with rising management and governance responsibilities, while at the same time providing advanced curriculum knowledge and classroom instruction (Vulliamy & Webb, 1996; Wilson & McPake, 1998); while in Scotland, where teaching principals led 38% of primary schools, issues
related to managing change and inadequate support structures (Wilson & McPake, 1998). A decade later in her follow up study of 100 small schools in Scotland, Wilson (2009) reported that the principal’s leadership style was contingent on the multi faceted task of being both principal and teacher. Wilson observed that the workload and pressures on the principals increased between the time frames of the two studies and questioned whether the role of teaching principal could be sustained. Likewise, in New Zealand, where 50% of schools have less than 150 students, teaching principals claimed they worked an average 60 hours per week at school, plus additional hours at home (Armstrong, 2002; Eddy, 2006). In similar findings to those reported in Australia and the United Kingdom, a recurring theme throughout Armstrong’s (2002) New Zealand study was that teaching principals’ stress was attributable to the pressures of juggling the administrative aspects of the role with the demands of teaching.

Although Armstrong’s (2002) study comprised just 14 teaching principals, his findings supported Livingstone’s (1999) study of 186 teaching principals, who claimed to work an average week of 65 hours and Wylie’s (1997) study that suggested an average of 60 hours each week. Consequently, the average turnover rate of teaching principals in forty schools in three school regions in New Zealand, was a new principal every 2.42 years, with some schools seeing eight and sometimes nine principals in a ten year period (Whittall, 2001). Whittall compared this turnover rate to twenty larger schools in the same regions, where 85% had either no, or one principal change in a ten year period and the remaining 15% had two changes. Further analysis revealed that 32% of the teaching principals who either returned to the classroom or found careers outside education, cited the workload as the primary reason, while other issues included unpleasantness from ongoing conflict; the range of community expectations; lack of privacy and personal time; and living and working on the school site (Whittall, 2001). As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Lester (2001) made similar observations when she reported a 45% turnover of teaching principals in a one-year period in just one region in Queensland and revealed that 30% of the teaching principals returned to the classroom, while 15% left the profession entirely. Similar outcomes were found with the twelve teaching principals involved in this study. Five years after their first year as a teaching principal only one was still actively working in the role. A review of their careers is provided in Appendix E.
Although some beginning principals have deputy principal experience, the majority of primary school principals move directly from classroom teaching into the principal’s role. Their performance therefore, reflects an amalgam of their experiences, their values, beliefs, gender socialisation and career aspirations (Boon & Stott, 2003). By understanding how a beginning principal conceptualises and encounters the role, we are able to make some sense of their experiences and the choices they make in the process (Boon & Stott, 2003). This study will contribute to the literature by providing an insight into the conceptualisations and experiences of female beginning principals, within the geographic context of rural and remote schools.

Given the complexities, challenges and workloads of beginning principals and teaching principals described above, the following section will consider the training provided to those who undertake the role.

4.3.3 Training for the principalship

In a study into the training provided to Queensland school principals, Dempster (2001) found little training occurred in the essential aspects of establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Although 65% of principals in his study sought training in interpersonal skills, only 28% indicated they received appropriate training and few had undertaken postgraduate courses. More recently, Garcia-Garduno et al, (2011) reported from their review of both English-speaking and non-English speaking countries, that the universal problem for new principals was interpersonal relationships, where they provided a buffer between the school and the community. No training was provided in this aspect of the role and the majority felt unprepared. Despite there being no formal training programmes for beginning principals, most regions in Queensland offer informal aspiring leaders’ or induction programmes (APAPDC, 2002). However, as this study will show, most of the participants in this study did not value the programmes they attended, or found they were not context specific to their circumstances.

Other countries reported a similar lack of beginning principal training. In New Zealand, where 46% of beginning principals were appointed to small primary schools, most primary school principals tended to rely on learning on the job and from peers, rather than from the formal nationwide induction programme on offer (Cardno, 2003; Collins,
Similar observations came from Canada, where almost 60% of beginning principals in rural schools received little, or no training in fundamental aspects of the role (Walker, et al. 2003). The principals downplayed formal training, which they perceived as not relevant to the day to day tasks, such as staff supervision and parental involvement, they were required to perform.

Nevertheless, formal training programmes do exist in some countries. For instance, in the United States, a key criterion for appointment as principal is completion of a master’s degree in Educational Administration, although the efficacy of the programme has been disputed as being outdated and requiring an overhaul (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Foleno & Foley, 2001; Gamage & Ueyama, 2004; Jentz & Murphy, 2005; Murphy, 2001); England offers a mandatory National Professional Qualification for Headship; Hong Kong has the Certification for Principalship; Scotland offers a two year Scottish Qualification for Headship programme; and Sweden offers a three year National Headteachers’ Training Programme (Johansson, 2001; Reeves, Morris, Turner & Forde, 2001; Southworth & Doughty, 2006; Wong, 2006). According to Wong, principals in both England and Hong Kong reported two advantages tied to attending training programmes. Firstly, the training provided confidence to handle the tasks; and secondly, they found the emotional support invaluable.

Research evidence indicated that beginning principals wanted leadership programmes to relate to the real-world practices of schools, where skills and knowledge could be applied to each individual context; where internships, mentors and peer support could be conjointly offered; and where activities and assessments focused on stimulating effective problem-solving and self reflection (Baugh, 2003; Bright & Ware, 2003; Bush & Glover, 2004; Crow, 2002; Daresh, 2001; Davis et al, 2005; Hobson et al, 2003; Kolb & Boyatzis, 1999). Programmes needed to address managing change; strategies for collaborative decision-making; understanding school culture; the analysis and use of data; and the ability to reflect and analyse self-behaviour (Davis et al, 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). In other words, they needed to help the beginning principal demystify leadership and provide opportunities to develop skills and therefore should focus on, “...practical,

Teaching principals in rural and remote areas have similar needs, especially as they are more likely to be less experienced teachers; do not have experienced support staff; and face geographic and social isolation (Howley et al, 2002). In an investigation into the training provided to over 500 teaching principals in Queensland, none of the respondents acknowledged receiving any formal small school administration training prior to taking on the role (Lester, 2001). Lester’s findings were reflected in this study. Although one participant was involved in a work shadowing programme at her request, one had prior experience with a mentor, one attended a short in-service programme in leadership and another two attended a two-day aspiring leaders’ programme, six of the participants had not attended any training prior to moving into the role.

Likewise, in the United Kingdom, teaching principals reported feelings of inadequacy when dealing with the social complexities of their school communities, including family instability and sought training so as not to damage the school-community relationships (Jones, 2006). As will be shown in this study, the relationship between the teaching principal and community can be fragile and have ongoing repercussions. For instance, due to a breakdown of her relationship with the community, one of the teaching principals, Eve, eventually moved to a neighbouring town and commuted to school.

In a study of the training provided to new principals in Australia, O’Mahony (2003) recommended the provision of a mentoring system with experienced principals, in what he termed “A master and apprentice phase” (p 7). The leadership literature has increasingly extolled the benefits of mentoring for beginning principals, claiming that it reduced a sense of professional isolation and increased skill levels, while at the same time closing the gap between theory and reality (Hobson, 2003; Howley et al, 2002; Luck, 2003; Peterson & Kelley, 2001). Researchers have consistently argued that aspiring principals benefit as much from mentoring relationships as they do from formal leadership programmes (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2001; Ehrich, Hansford & Tennent, 2004; Mertz, 2004; O’Mahony, 2003).
Mentors were seen to provide guidance, professional support and career direction as well as help the beginning principals improve their confidence; build a repertoire of leadership skills; and listen to them, rather than just provide solutions (Bahnisch, 2006; Coleman, 2007; Gardiner, Enomoto & Grogan, 2000; Hobson, 2003; Luck, 2003; McCulla, 2011; McMurtrie, 1997; Mertz, 2004; Patterson & Kelleher, 2005; Rhode, 2002; Samier, 2000; Sherman, 2002; J. Watterston, 2010a; Young, 2007). Essentially, Hall (2006) suggested the primary role of the mentor was to encourage and to reassure beginning principals:

\[
... \text{that all the strange events that happen in and around the principal’s office are, well, normal, and that there are reasonable ways to handle every bizarre and unorthodox circumstance.} \ (p \ 1)
\]

Two primary issues regarding mentors working with beginning teaching principals have been raised. The first was the need to demonstrate the mentor’s credibility by having experience working in small rural and remote schools; while the second issue was to do with whether females needed female mentors (Blackman & Fenwick, 2000; Malone, 2001). Although females make up the majority of teachers, their supervisors, or the principals with greatest experience, tend to be males (Blackman & Fenwick, 2000; Sherman, 2005). Despite there being a limited pool from which to select female mentors, it has been suggested that a male mentor could prove just as suitable (Gardiner et al, 2000; Laff, 2009; Mertz 2004; J. Watterston 2010a). Watterston argued that females did not necessarily need other females to be mentors; that males could just as aptly provide the support they required and Laff commented, “Most women do not believe it is essential to match women with a female mentor” (p 34).

In this research, the female teaching principals acknowledged the value of mentoring and rated it above formal systemic training. Several participants commented that they wished an experienced small school mentor had been available to them for support and guidance. They did not specify the gender of the mentor, but stated their preference for an experienced teaching principal in a similarly banded school. However, none of the participants was afforded the opportunity to participate in a mentoring arrangement.

Despite the obvious need for training, it should be noted that in addition to the difficulties associated with finding a mentor willing to undertake the role in a rural and
remote area, there are inherent challenges for teaching principals to access formal training once they move into the role. These challenges include the travel time involved, accessing overnight accommodation and in the case of schools where the teaching principal is the sole teacher, finding a replacement teacher for that period. Regardless of the lack of resources, teaching principals have acknowledged that “good looking programmes for enhancing and supporting school leadership” (p 25) existed, but alluded to the gap between the information presented in training programmes and the reality of every day practice in small schools (Jones, 2006).

4.4 Small school communities

The term community has been defined as:

“...a group of people with a shared locality and a shared set of common values...it is representative of the relationships people interact in on an everyday basis”. (Lane & Dorfman, 1997, p. 2)

Similarly, a former teacher at a one teacher school wrote:

The bush school is to the bush township what the monastery was to the English village in medieval society, what the parsonage may be in some English country places today. (Education Queensland, 2000)

Given the geographic nature of Australia, most states and territories have a proliferation of rural and remote schools. Over the past several years research into small schools has been forthcoming from Queensland (Clarke, 2002, 2003; Clarke & Stevens, 2004, 2006; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Lester, 2001, 2003); South Australia (Barty, Thomson, Blackmore, & Sachs, 2005); Victoria (O’Mahony, 2003; Starr & White, 2008); Western Australia (Sharplin, 2002; Wildy, 2004; Wildy & Clarke, 2005), and the Northern Territory (Moskowitz & Whitmore, 1997; Quong, 2006). Much of the research has pointed to the high rate of principal turnover and emphasised the potentially negative influence that has on the community (Lester, 2001; Saiti, 2005). In areas where the turnover rate has been historically high, stakeholders may not be inclined to build relationships with new staff whom they perceive as itinerants who will not stay and contribute long term to the community (Herrington & Herrington, 2006; Tuck, 2009). Nevertheless, as Fullan (2000) asserted:
...schools need the outside to get the job done. These external forces, however, do not come in helpful packages; they are an amalgam of complex and uncoordinated phenomena. The work of the school is to figure out how to make its relationship with them a productive one. (p 583)

While the research mentioned here and in earlier sections of this dissertation has provided insight into the workings of rural and remote school communities, it has not been gender specific. This study fills that gap in knowledge, by detailing the first hand experiences of female teaching principals and the approaches they took to build relationships within the small communities.

4.4.1 Small school stakeholders

Extensive literature exists regarding the relationship between principals and teachers, but it has neglected the relationship between the teaching principal and other staff, such as administrative assistants and teacher aides, who tend to be local community members and exert influence over the community’s perceptions (Beatty, 2000; Blasé & Blasé, 2003; Blasé & Kirby, 2000; Bredeson & Johansson, 2000; Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). This study addressed that oversight by interviewing not only other teaching staff, but also non-teaching staff and obtaining their insights into teaching principals’ experiences.

The general consensus from teachers is that they want the principal to respect them for their experience; give them autonomy to work with students; be supportive; and to demonstrate strong leadership skills (Bogler, 2001; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Hill & Lineback, 2011; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). However, in rural and remote schools, teachers have expressed concern about the turnover of teaching principals, claiming that they arrived with insufficient knowledge or training and wanted to make changes which destabilised the school routines (Graham et al, 2009).

Undoubtedly, a key member of the staff in a small school is the administrative assistant, whose working hours are dictated by school enrolment numbers. However, when they are at school the administrative assistant provides a buffer for the teaching principal, handling telephone calls, school visitors, dealing with accounts and caring for ill children. In fact, Lacey (2007) advocated increased administrative support time in
schools, claiming that education dollars could be better spent than paying principals to fill out forms. Consequently, a positive working relationship must exist between the principal and the person in that role. Murdoch and Schiller (2002) quoted one school principal as saying, “...in a small school the school secretary is invaluable, if they are not here you’re really up the creek”. (p. 11)

Alice, one of the teaching principals in this study, agreed:

>The admin is excellent, well run, because Mary has been there such a long time...I don’t find her ideas unreasonable. She knows what has to be done and the P&C [Parents and Citizens Association] don’t challenge her ideas and she’s well respected.

Conversely, Eve’s workload increased due to her lack of confidence in the administrative assistant’s abilities:

>I started writing it [the newsletter] because the admin was an imbecile. She had been in the job for 14 years and still couldn’t do the job. That put pressure on me and I couldn’t trust her for confidentiality.

Teacher aides also play a vital part in a small, one teacher school where they fill a quasi-teaching role. Education Queensland (2010) defined the role of teacher aide as providing support to teachers in the way of:

>...developing and obtaining resources, setting up and operating equipment, undertaking administrative duties, supervising students and participating in teaching activities under the direction of a teacher. (p. 1)

Like administrative assistants, teacher aides in small one teacher schools are frequently long term residents of the area, are familiar with the students and their families and are trusted and respected by the community (Johns, Kilpatrick, Falk & Mulford, 2001). Johns et al concluded that support staff often built the social bridge between the school, the principal and the community.

Other stakeholders interviewed for this study were students’ parents, who exert influence over the teaching principal’s relationships within the community. Over recent years parents have been particularly vocal about their requirements for a teaching principal. Among other prerequisites they have requested at least three years teaching experience, as well as communication and leadership skills (Isolated Children’s Parent
Association (ICPA), 2009). The ICPA also supported research that called for teaching principals to be exposed to practicums in rural and remote schools prior to principal placement, in order to understand the needs and culture of small school communities (Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Millwater & Beutel, 2009; Roberts, 2004).

4.4.2 School culture

Understanding and being able to lead within the context of a school’s culture is considered a substantial challenge for beginning principals (Duncan & Seguin, 2002). The definition of school culture is multi-faceted and encompasses the shared assumptions, beliefs, practices and myths of a group (Duignan, 1987; Starratt, 1993). Put succinctly, culture is the glue that holds the organisation together (Osland, Kolb & Rubin, 2001), or, as Turner & Crang (1996, p 8) claimed, “This is the way things are done around here”.

School culture is contained within everything that happens in the school from the ceremonies, rules and rewards, to how the staff dress and speak to each other and the students (Peterson & Deal, 1998; Starratt, 1993). In some communities, despite the pervading nature of the school’s culture, members may not be conscious of, or able to verbalise, the values, beliefs, attitudes and norms that make up its culture. Instead they may be driven by an intrinsic, subconscious acknowledgement that the actions and behaviours of others in the community represent what is commonly done or said in that community (Brown, 2004). It is therefore a high priority for all principals, experienced or novice, to understand the culture of the school (Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Stewart, 2000). In rural and remote communities this is especially relevant, since the culture tends to prescribe the behaviour of its residents, especially that of the teaching principal (Yarrow et al, 1999). If teaching principals do not display the behaviour expected of them, they may find they are isolated within the community and unable to interact with its members (Lunn, 1997).

Principals also need to be aware that their influence on the school culture can be covertly, as well as overtly made and therefore need to be wary of their initial impact (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Peterson & Deal, 1998). In order to signal willingness to fit into the community the new principal should give public credit to the heroes and heroines of
the school’s history; celebrate the achievements of staff, students and the broader community; and maintain a focus on students’ achievements (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Peterson & Deal, 1998). In spite of the rhetoric regarding school culture, each school is situationally specific and it is impossible to provide a one size fits all description (Turner & Crang, 1996).

This brief overview has highlighted the growing body of literature relevant to teaching principals in small school communities. However, there continues to be limited research informing our understanding of how female teaching principals conceptualise their role as leaders and how they deal with the situations which confront them. The findings have not been gender specific and as such, failed to acknowledge the contextual differences for females beginning their educational leadership careers as teaching principals. This thesis will add to this growing body of knowledge by presenting firsthand accounts of the way in which females conceptualise their leadership role in the context of small rural and remote schools.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter reviewed the literature relating to beginning principals, teaching principals and the relationships within small school communities. It commenced by reviewing the skills beginning principals required to navigate the challenges leading to their success and went on to discuss the burgeoning and often unexpected bureaucratic workload demands.

The following sections discussed the training programmes for beginning principals and teaching principals and signalled the lack of formal programmes available in Australia and the need for future training to address day-to-day tasks and activities rather than formal, theoretical programmes.

The final section of this chapter briefly addressed the stakeholders and culture that make up a small school community. It considered the way in which stakeholders relate to teaching principals, the value of non-teaching staff in a small school community and the ability of beginning principals to adapt to the school culture.
Throughout the chapter the complex duality of the teaching principal’s role, of juggling the administrative workload and teaching responsibilities, was highlighted through reference to the dynamics of a small community; building relationships; understanding the culture which sometimes precludes newcomers; lack of privacy; and the isolation of living in a rural and remote area.

It is apparent from the review of literature on leadership and school principals in these three chapters, that high expectations are placed on any school leader, but they are magnified many times when inexperienced and untrained individuals are placed in the teaching principal’s role. Furthermore, the conservative nature of small school communities impacts on the way teaching principals lead their schools, assimilate into the community and are accepted. Acceptance includes how individuals dress, their mannerisms and their social interactions, all of which provide clues as to how the culture defines gender roles.

Relative to this study, were the performances of individuals within their culturally contextual roles, which pointed toward acceptance or resistance. In other words, this study addressed the social practices in rural and remote small school communities and how those practices defined gendered behaviours. The views of the female beginning teaching principals, therefore, provided a valuable insight into the construction of principal gender within the context of the small rural and remote communities in which these women lived and worked. As Chapter 6 will attest, the female teaching principals were confronted with the constraints placed on them by their communities and the need to deconstruct how they perceived themselves as females in authority.

This thesis aims to add to the literature by placing the experiences of female beginning teaching principals in the context of rural and remote communities, with an emphasis on the social interactions they encountered as they forged their leadership skills.

The following chapter will detail the methodology and research design of this study. It includes a description of the teaching principal and stakeholder participants and the communities in which they lived, followed by a description of the method used to collect and analyse the data.
CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 Introduction

The overall aim of this research was to examine the leadership experiences of female beginning teaching principals in rural or remote small school communities. The chapter will therefore focus on the design of the study and detail how the research was conducted. It is presented in four sections. The first section discusses the methodological framework which underpins the study; the second section provides details of the female teaching principals, the school stakeholder participants and the small school communities in which they lived; while the third section describes the organisational procedures for initiating this research, the instruments used for data collection and the two phases of the study. In the final section the manner in which the data were analysed is explained.

5.2 Methodological Framework

5.2.1 Qualitative Research

In order to describe and understand the experiences of the twelve female beginning teaching principals involved in this study, a qualitative, inductive design was used to, “...explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (Merriam, 1998, p 5). In determining the best research methodology particular note was taken of Fisher’s (2006) comment that a qualitative framework was suited to, “…describe and understand actual instances of human action and experience from the perspective of the participants who are living through a particular situation” (p xvi).

Rather than test hypotheses and theories or verify predetermined ideas, qualitative research is designed to inductively discover new insights and build an enhanced understanding of issues surrounding a particular setting (Merriam, 1998). It focuses on natural environments and allows those being studied to speak for themselves. In essence, it addresses the meanings individuals place on their day-to-day lived experiences, while making no assumptions, but rather focusing on the viewpoint of
those being studied with the intent that discovery will lead to new perspectives (Green, 1997; Sherman & Webb, 1997).

Through the use of qualitative research the subjective experience of each individual is highlighted, yet the process is flexible enough to recognise each story is a reality for that person. As such, it is not intended to prove an hypothesis but rather to understand the knowledge absorbed by the individual and to validate and make sense of their perceptions (Grace, 1994; Michael, 1996). In other words, reality is constructed by individuals as they interact with their social world. As will be seen in this research, each of the twelve female teaching principals provided subjective accounts of their experiences in their own unique worlds. While each held similar elements of remoteness, acceptance and adjustment, they approached their situations with distinctive expectations, backgrounds and personalities. Their stories reflected their uniqueness which complied with the demands of a qualitative study, where researchers are intent on understanding the meaning individuals construct from their experiences and how those experiences govern their behaviour, which in turn impacts on the processes of an organisation (Limerick, 1991; Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative research’s distinctive characteristics include the use of the natural settings of those being studied and the use of multiple methods, such as interviews, observations and documents to collect data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Hutchinson, 1997). The primary instrument for collecting data is the researcher, who weaves each individual’s story into a larger story from which a theory is developed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2009). Consequently, the data holds an interpretive quality aimed at discovering the meaning individuals assign to their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Accordingly, statistical significance is not attached to the results; instead, the researcher determines the usefulness and credibility of the data and the absence of a predetermined theory allows for an emerging process to develop (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2009; Eisner, 1991; Patton, 2002).

These substantial characteristics were seen to match the purpose of this study for a number of reasons. Interviewing the teaching principals in their natural setting allowed them to reflect on their expectations at the beginning of the year and their experiences at its end. Situated in their social environment, the interviews permitted the participants...
the opportunity to describe an event in their own words, with their own interpretation, which afforded the interviewer an opportunity for greater understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Furthermore, the researcher was able to detect patterns of experiences from the individual stories, resulting in an emerging meaning and contribution to the overall aims of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Creswell, 2009).

In using a qualitative research design however, Creswell (2009) cautioned that although the researcher is the primary data collection instrument, she needs to be aware of the personal filters she brings to the study and should take steps to ensure the end findings are not merely a statement of her personal opinions. Creswell referred to this acknowledgement as reflexivity and stated that it represented honesty and openness to the research. For clarification, it should be noted that the researcher in this study was not and had never been, a teaching principal and had no experience of living in a small rural or remote area. She therefore brought no significant biases, values or preconceived opinions about the experiences of female teaching principals living in rural and remote small school communities.

After determining that a qualitative research framework suited the aims of the study it became necessary to determine which of the four major types of qualitative research should be implemented: phenomenology, ethnography, case study, or grounded theory (Crotty, 1998; Jones, Kriflik & Zanko, 2005; Merriam, 1998; van Manen, 1990). Of the four approaches, grounded theory with its inductive theory based directly in the empirical data, was deemed most relevant. By employing grounded theory, data could be used to generate theory based on day-to-day lived experiences. In addition, the tenet of grounded theory is that the same event or situation should be considered in different situations and different settings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss referred to this development of theory as the constant comparative method; that is, asking the same questions of several individuals and comparing their responses. They proposed that by comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences, themes and categories would emerge (Merriam, 1998).

This research met the grounded theory tenet stated above. The same event, that is, female teaching principals commencing their leadership careers, was considered from the perspective of those living in diverse rural and remote settings. By comparing the
stories of each participant it was expected that themes would emerge to generate a theory regarding this particular phenomenon. An explanation of why grounded theory was used in this study is now presented to more clearly articulate how this research proceeded.

5.2.2 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s, initially focusing on individuals dying in hospital, but later expanding to all fields of investigation (Charmaz, 2006; Elliott & Lazenbatt, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hutchinson, 1997; Wadham, 2009).

In accordance with qualitative research, grounded theory relates to the development of theory from data without a pre determined hypothesis and emphasises the importance of understanding human behaviour through a process of discovery and induction (Elliott & Lazenbatt, 2005). Glaser and Strauss (1967) sought to develop a methodology which would allow them to examine events that occurred in the real world and relate it back to a systematic theory (Tavakol, Torabi & Zeinaloo, 2006). Through grounded theory, researchers explore the social processes within human interaction, thereby developing explanations grounded in empirical data to explain the processes (Hutchinson, 2001).

In order to analyse data, the grounded theory researcher looks for similarities and differences in patterns of behaviour. By comparing behaviours, or reactions to incidents, the researcher identifies repeating patterns which contribute to a greater understanding of social interactions (Hutchinson, 1997). Grounded theory is therefore particularly productive when little is known or understood about a specific behaviour or event. This was one of the factors which established the relevance of grounded theory for this research. A cursory review of the literature revealed little data existed regarding females in rural and remote school communities and even less about their experiences as beginning teaching principals. This research provided the opportunity to rectify this lack of knowledge by collecting their stories and placing them in the context of geographic isolation. The first-hand perceptions of the social and personal interactions they encountered fitted with Sherman, Webb and Andrews’s (1984) claim that grounded theory focused on the lived experiences of participants. By studying the female
beginning teaching principals’ stories within the context of small rural and remote school communities, a theory could emerge about the patterns of interaction they encountered and its impact on their leadership ambitions. The study therefore met one of the strongest tenets of grounded theory, that it not test an hypothesis, but rather seek to discover the theory implicit in the data through inductive and deductive reasoning and by formulating hypotheses based on conceptual ideas (Dick, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In his later writings, Glaser (2002) observed that grounded theory was a perspective based methodology and people’s perspectives varied. He added that it placed the focus on concepts that fit and are relevant, rather than worrying about data. Therefore the task of the researcher was to understand what was happening in the particular situation and how each individual managed their role (Dick, 2005). In order to accomplish this task the research commenced, “... by observations of certain relationships for which no satisfactory explanation exists...” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1984, p 49). Similarly, Merriam (1998) postulated that a researcher was intrigued by questions about why or how an event occurred and what it means for those involved. Given that context, grounded theory feeds a desire for the researcher to learn and to understand and in the process to enrich the knowledge base about the particular event.

It follows therefore, that the role of the researcher is paramount in the effective collection of grounded theory data. The next section provides a short introduction to the theory governing the role of the researcher, followed by a synopsis of the researcher for this particular study.

5.2.2.1 Role of the researcher

The principles of grounded theory dictate that the researcher should not commence the project with pre-conceived or pre-determined ideas regarding the information divulged by participants. In fact, researchers such as Strauss (1978), Stern (1985) and Glaser (1998) maintained that a literature review should not be conducted until after data are collected. They argued that too much familiarity with the literature had the potential to influence data collection, particularly in interviews where the researcher could unduly probe for detail, clarity or explanation (Strauss, 1978); that it could lead to pre-
judgement of the research findings and premature closure of data collection (Stern, 1985); and that a delay in reviewing the literature was essential, “... to keep the researcher as free as possible of influences that could restrict the freedom required for theoretical discovery, not to ignore extant and relevant knowledge” (Glaser, 1998, p. 360).

Instead of commencing their research with an hypothesis and seeking data to confirm or disprove their theory, grounded theory researchers start with a sense of curiosity and draw theory from the data in an effort to provide new insights into a situation and present explanations for its occurrence. Put more succinctly, the primary purpose of the researcher using grounded theory is to listen to the participants as they discuss matters of interest to them (Glaser & Holton, 2004). In this way the researcher discovers issues relevant to the participants and learns how they deal with, or resolve those issues.

In this study, the researcher’s sense of curiosity was aroused through observation that a disproportionate number of female teaching principals sought assistance for stress related matters and were more likely to relinquish the role of teaching principal than their male counterparts. At the commencement of this study the researcher had been the staff psychologist for seven years in two state education districts which encompassed two major regional centres, as well as a number of smaller towns and centres in rural and remote areas, stretching down the east coast of Queensland and through central Queensland to the furthest western border. The researcher had never worked as a teaching principal, nor had she lived or worked in a rural or remote area and was therefore not subjected to bias about living in those communities. Due to lack of accommodation, she rarely remained overnight when professional obligations caused her to visit the more remote areas, returning instead to the nearest major town.

Prior to undertaking the staff psychologist role, the researcher had taken a sabbatical from her role as psychologist in another government department and trained and worked as a primary school teacher. Although she was not transferred to a rural or remote area, her experiences in a lower socio-economic suburban school in Brisbane later afforded her credibility with teaching staff when discussing the stressful conditions under which they operated. Likewise, credibility was established with teaching principals due to the number of rural and remote school locations she visited and her acknowledgement of
the difficulties they encountered. The majority of the teaching principals were females and they expressed comfort in speaking with another female, especially as in most cases their supervisor was a male who did not relate to the unique circumstance of being a female in a small community.

Over the years the researcher became aware that many of the stories the female teaching principals told of stress due to isolation, loneliness and “not fitting in” were similar. There were subtle and not so subtle comments from staff and community members about “a city woman” coming into their midst, making changes to the way the school functioned, and either not joining in community activities, or being considered “brash” or “man hungry”. Added to this was a sense of isolation due to being separated from a network of family and friends and the inability to de-stress by going anonymously in the community, or visiting a coffee shop with friends. In addition, apart from the community issues, the female teaching principals also discussed what they perceived as an excessive workload. Other than the workload issues, few social or acceptance matters, were raised by the male teaching principals.

The researcher also became aware that male teaching principals moved more rapidly up the career ladder to larger schools, whereas females, if they chose not to relinquish their teaching principal position and return to the classroom, were more likely to move into deputy principal roles, or transfer to another Band 5 school closer to amenities. The researcher began to question whether there was a pattern to these observations and whether they would hold true across a broader geographic context.

This short overview sets the scene for the researcher’s involvement in this research and meets the criteria for grounded theory researchers. To summarise:

- The researcher had never lived in a rural or remote area and therefore had no preconceived notions of living in that environment (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
- The researcher had never worked as a teaching principal, but had worked as a teacher in a lower socio-economic city school which provided credibility and “insider status” (Crawford, 2008, p. 36)
The researcher was curious and questioned the phenomenon of relationships that she observed over a period of time, but for which there was no immediate satisfactory explanation (McMillan & Schumacher, 1984; Merriam, 1998).

The researcher had no personal experience of the phenomenon and no personal connections with the participants (Blodgett, 2008).

In her role of staff psychologist, the researcher was able to become involved in a non-threatening way in the teaching principal’s world and explore that world through their eyes, with a view to gaining insights into the social structures and organisation of their society (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Prior to commencing the study the researcher had not read widely on the subject, or formulated a hypothesis to explain her observations (Glaser, 1998; Stern, 1985; Strauss, 1978).

This section explained the reasons for choosing to use a qualitative research framework and grounded theory for the study. It also considered the role of the researcher in qualitative research and the reasons for initiating the study. The following section will consider the teaching principals and stakeholders who took part, as well as outlining the small communities which were pivotal in understanding the social interactions that occurred.

5.3 Participants and small school communities

5.3.1 Teaching Principal Participants

The outcome of applications for thirty Band 5 and fourteen Band 6 teaching principal positions in Education Queensland state schools was released toward the end of the school year (in Queensland the end of the school year occurs in mid December), with successful appointments scheduled to take effect from January 1 of the following year. In the year this research commenced, 47% of the successful applicants for Band 5 schools were females, 20% were males and 33% were not substantively filled. For the Band 6 schools, female applicants were successful in 29% of the schools; males in 57% and 14% remained substantively unfilled. Table 5.1 summarises successful applicants in
Bands 5 and 6 schools at the commencement of the research year and Figure 5.1 presents the outcome in graphic format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Band</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Unfilled</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band 5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(47%)</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
<td>(33%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band 6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(29%)</td>
<td>(57%)</td>
<td>(14%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.1  Band 5 and Band 6 principal applications in the research year

5.3.1.1 Teaching principals’ selection

Participants for this study were chosen via selective sampling, based on particular characteristics. They needed to be (a) female; (b) undertaking their first principalship; and (c) based in a rural or remote area.

The successful female teaching principal applicants referred to in Table 5.1, were initially contacted by telephone by the researcher and later by e-mail, explaining the research aims and requesting their participation. A letter explaining the research and assuring confidentiality was also sent to each applicant, along with a consent form and a biography questionnaire. Six of the fourteen successful female applicants for Band 5 schools agreed to participate. A further three females, who were to commence long term acting principal positions in Band 5 schools, were identified through Education
Queensland’s data base and agreed to participate. Three of the four females appointed to Band 6 schools also agreed to take part in the study. One of the three was previously a teaching principal in a Band 5 school, but was selected as her previous school was considerably smaller with fewer staff and students. In addition, she was considered a “local” in the previous community as her children grew up in the area. There were therefore 12 beginning female teaching principals in the first phase of this research – nine from Band 5 and three from Band 6 schools.

5.3.1.2 Teaching principals’ demographics

The participants’ ages ranged from the early twenties to sixty years, with five in the 20 to 30 year age group. Half the participants were married or living with a partner, while the other half were single with no permanent relationship. Three claimed to have adult children living away from home, thereby providing an opportunity to undertake a challenge they admitted was impossible when their children were younger and dependent. Table 5.2 profiles the ages and marital status of the female teaching principals involved in this study.

Table 5.2  Ages and Marital Status Teaching Principal participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51-60</th>
<th>60+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married or living with partner</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was diverse teaching experience within the group, the least experienced having taught for 3 years, the most experienced for 28 years. The participant with 3 years experience was in the 20-30 year age range and the most experienced in the 51-60 year range. The number of years teaching experience is outlined in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3  Teaching experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years teaching experience</th>
<th>1-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>11-15</th>
<th>16-20</th>
<th>20+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seven participants claimed no previous experience as a teaching principal, while four acted for between a few weeks and a term as the principal in the school to which they were now appointed. As mentioned earlier, one participant was previously a teaching principal in a small Band 5 school, but was included in this study as she was now principal of a Band 6 school in a different, more complex community. Eight participants claimed some experience living in a small school community either when growing up, or as a teacher, while the teaching practice of the remaining four was restricted to cities or large regional schools. The participants’ previous teaching principal experience and small community experience is shown in Table 5.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First teaching principal experience</th>
<th>First small school community living</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four teaching principals admitted to no prior experience working with multi age classes and claimed this was one of their primary areas of concern. Two of the four were to be the sole teacher in their school, responsible for teaching the curriculum across all year levels, from “prep” to Year 7.

In order to become better acquainted with the twelve female beginning teaching principals in this study, a brief overview of each individual is provided below. Please note that in order to protect the identities of the participants pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis.

5.3.1.3 Overview individual teaching principals

Alice was in the 20-30 year age group and unmarried, but living with her partner. Apart from part time work during her time at university, Alice had no other employment history. Following completion of a Bachelor of Education, she taught for five years, including a period overseas, before considering promotion. After being given the opportunity to act as principal for a semester, she decided this was the best career path for her and was successful in her application for the substantive position when it became available. Although she previously taught in a Band 8 school in a small rural
town, the school where she was to be teaching principal was more remote and without a township. Her previous school had been large enough not to require multi age teaching, so she was inexperienced in teaching more than one year level. However, in her new role she was to be the sole teacher from the newly formed “prep” year to Year 7. One of the advantages for Alice was that as a result of her semester of acting principal in the school, she was familiar with the families and staff.

**Ann** was in the 41-50 year age group, married and with grown children. Her husband was able to take leave of absence from his employment and accompanied her to the new location. Although Ann was a teacher with fifteen years experience, including multi age teaching, she had not previously applied for a principal’s position and had not acted in the role in any other school due to her children’s youth. Prior to undertaking tertiary study to obtain a Bachelor of Teaching, a Bachelor of Education and a Graduate Certificate in Education (specialty field), Ann travelled extensively overseas, worked in another government department and was a stay-at-home mother until her children were old enough to attend school. Despite having earlier taught in a small school community, Ann admitted her new school was more remote than others where she previously taught.

**Daphne** was over 60 years of age, married and with grown children. Before undertaking tertiary study to obtain a Diploma in Education, a Bachelor of Education and a Graduate Certificate in Education (specialty field), she worked in a variety of jobs. However, at the time of this research Daphne had been teaching for seventeen years. On four previous occasions she unsuccessfully applied for teaching principal roles, but was finally offered the chance to act as principal for a term and was subsequently offered the permanent position. Although she had no previous experience living or working in a rural or remote community, Daphne had taught in multi age classes.

**Eve** was in the 31-40 year age group and unmarried. At the commencement of this study she had been a teacher for six years and apart from casual employment while undertaking tertiary study to obtain a Bachelor of Education degree, had no other employment history. As a result of previously teaching in a small school Eve had multi age teaching experience and briefly acted as teaching principal in another school. She unsuccessfully applied for a teaching principal position on two prior occasions and admitted that she became aware of this one “by accident” when reading a newspaper.
Heather was in the 20-30 year age group and unmarried. She claimed no other employment history apart from part time work while studying toward her Bachelor of Education degree. At the commencement of this study Heather had been teaching for eight years, but had not previously applied for a principal’s position, although she acted for a brief period as deputy principal in a large school. She was not experienced in teaching multi age classes, but in her new school would be responsible for twenty-six Year 6 and 7 students. Heather had never worked with a female principal, but had been encouraged and motivated to apply by a female deputy principal whom she admired. She was cautious about living in a rural and remote area as her life and teaching practice was confined to large regional centres with no rural or remote community experiences.

Iris was in the 51-60 year age group and married with grown children. She was in her late thirties when she qualified as a teacher with a Diploma of Teaching and later a Bachelor of Education degree. At the commencement of this research Iris had worked as a teacher for fourteen years. Although she was born and raised in a major city, her husband was from a rural area and she moved there when they married. Prior to becoming a teacher Iris worked as a teacher’s aide and following her graduation undertook teaching positions in small rural schools, thereby gaining experience in teaching multi age classes. Despite acting as principal for short periods in three other schools, Iris was unsuccessful in applying for the teaching principal’s role on three occasions before eventually being approved for her current school.

Janice was in the 51-60 year age group and married with grown children. She had been a teacher for over 25 years and apart from a few years when she first left school as a teenager, held no other employment. Her tertiary qualifications included a Diploma of Teaching and a Bachelor of Education and due to teaching in other small schools she was experienced in multi age teaching. Janice made the decision to apply for the principalship when she looked for a new challenge in her life, but was unsuccessful with her first two applications despite acting as principal a number of times. Although she lived in a large regional centre she applied for a small rural school as she preferred the country lifestyle.

Jill was in the 51-60 year age group and married with grown children. She had been a teacher for over 25 years, ten as a teaching principal in another small school. As
mentioned earlier, Jill was included in this study because her new school was a Band 6, compared to a small Band 5 in a community where she was considered a “local”. She therefore had multi age classroom experience and was familiar with living in a rural area. Jill decided it was time to look for another challenge and to seek promotion to a higher band school, when her children completed their education and left home. Her tertiary qualifications included a Certificate of Teaching, a Diploma of Teaching, and a Graduate Diploma of Education.

Nan was in the 31-40 year age group and unmarried. Prior to undertaking tertiary study she worked in a number of jobs, including governess in rural and remote areas and was not daunted by the prospect of isolation. At the commencement of this study she had been a teacher for four years, but had not taught in a rural or remote school and was unfamiliar with multi-age teaching. Nan expressed some anxiety about multi age teaching, as she was to be the only teacher and responsible for all year levels. This was Nan’s first application for a teaching principal role, having being encouraged to apply by her former principal and senior staff at District Office.

Natalie was in the 20-30 year age group and unmarried. Prior to undertaking study toward a Bachelor of Education degree she worked in a heavy industrial job. At the commencement of this study she had been teaching for five years in one small rural school, where she acted as teaching principal when required. She was therefore familiar with multi age teaching and in her new school would be the only teacher for all year levels. Natalie was encouraged and supported in her application for the teaching principal role by her former female principal, upon whom Natalie intended modeling herself. In addition, she had grown up in a small rural town and was undaunted by the prospect of isolation, claiming that she preferred small towns to regional centres.

Nina was in the 20-30 year age group and unmarried. Prior to completing a Bachelor of Business and a Graduate Bachelor of Education, Nina worked in another highly responsible government position. She changed careers to experience a new challenge and at the commencement of this study had been a teacher for three years. Having grown up in a large regional centre and later working in Brisbane, Nina had no experience living or working in a small rural or remote area and was inexperienced in teaching multi age classes. She applied for the acting teaching principal position at the
encouragement of her previous school principal and wanted to experience the role before deciding whether to apply for a substantive position.

**Sally** was in the 20-30 year age group and unmarried. At the commencement of this study she had been a teacher for six years and apart from temporary casual jobs while studying for a Bachelor of Education, knew no other employment. Early in her teaching career Sally worked in one of the more remote indigenous schools in Queensland and enjoyed the experience. She was later transferred to a more preferred coastal regional centre, but after a short time felt the need for a change of scenery and missed working in a remote area with indigenous students. She had not previously applied for a principal’s role, but her former principal encouraged her to apply, despite not having principal experience.

### 5.3.2 Stakeholder Participants

For the purposes of this study stakeholders were identified as teaching and non-teaching staff members, students’ parents, Parents and Citizens (P&C) committee members and District Office personnel. For the data to be relevant and meaningful to the topic participants needed a vested interest in the school and first-hand knowledge of the community.

During their first semester each of the twelve female beginning teaching principals provided a list of stakeholders’ names and contact details to the researcher, who subsequently contacted each individual requesting their participation in the study. Initial contact to explain the research was made by telephone, but a follow-up e-mail was later sent outlining the objectives and aims of the study. Confidentiality was assured and although the principal provided the names, she was not advised who agreed to participate. As well as the telephone call and e-mail, a letter explaining the research along with a consent form and a biography questionnaire was sent to each stakeholder. Seventeen stakeholders, consisting of fifteen females and two males, agreed to participate. Ten of the twelve participating schools were represented by at least one stakeholder.
Of the seventeen stakeholders, seven were teachers, four were administration officers, three were teacher aides, two were P&C committee members, and one was a representative from District Office. The role of stakeholder participants is shown in Table 5.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Admin Officers</th>
<th>Teacher Aides</th>
<th>P&amp;C Representative</th>
<th>District Office Representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fourteen of the stakeholders were married or living with a partner, while three were unmarried and living alone. As with the teaching principals, the stakeholders’ ages varied from twenty to over sixty years. Table 5.6 shows the age and gender of stakeholder participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-30 years</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40 years</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-60 years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apart from teachers, who are subject to the transfer process, participating stakeholders generally lived in the area for extended periods of time. However, some teachers were longer residents, having moved to the area after marrying a local resident, or meeting a partner while on transfer and remaining. Only three stakeholders lived in the small school community for less than one year, while the remainder listed between ten and thirty years in the area. Table 5.7 indicates the number of years stakeholders lived in their small school community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period lived in the area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30+ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&lt;1 year</th>
<th>5-10 years</th>
<th>10–15 years</th>
<th>15-20 years</th>
<th>20-25 years</th>
<th>25-30+ years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given the retention difficulties associated with small school principals, some stakeholders had worked with several principals at the same school. Six stakeholders worked with between six and nine principals at the same school; a further six worked with either two or three principals; while four noted that the current principal was their first experience. During the analysis stage of the study this information was found relevant, as it demonstrated the influence past principals exerted on stakeholders’ expectations of the teaching principal. See Table 5.8 for an overview of the number of principals with whom stakeholders worked.

Table 5.8  Number of principals (including current principal)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current principal only</th>
<th>2 principals</th>
<th>3 principals</th>
<th>6 principals</th>
<th>7 principals</th>
<th>8 principals</th>
<th>9 principals</th>
<th>Not answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.3  Participating schools and communities

The definition for rural and remote areas in this study was taken from the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Structure as identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2000). Major urban centres were listed as having 100,000 plus inhabitants, rural areas between 200 and 999 and remote areas less than 200 people. The classification was also measured in terms of access to service centres with 5,000 people or more in rural areas and less access for localities classified as remote (ABS, 2000). The school classification of Rural or Remote was derived from the Rural and Remote Classification List of MCEETYA (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) and Department of Education and the Arts (July 2007).

5.3.3.1 Schools

Seven of the schools were classified as being in Remote areas, while the remaining five were listed as Rural schools (Rural & Remote Classification, 2007). The oldest school in the study opened in the mid 19th century and was situated in a rural area, while the newest school was classified as remote and opened in the latter half of the 20th century.
Student enrolments in the nine Band 5 schools ranged from 10 to 68 students; while enrolments in the three Band 6 schools ranged from 55 to 86 students. Student enrolment in one school was made up entirely of Indigenous students, while another reported one third of its students were Indigenous. Other schools reported no Indigenous students and one in particular referred to the students as being “white Anglo Saxon”. School enrolment data are presented in Table 5.9.

Table 5.9 School enrolments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrolments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Band 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Nos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within the Queensland State education system, a transfer incentive scheme operates, whereby teachers acquire points for each year’s service in a school and the points accumulate toward future transfer. Preferred areas, such as cities, regional towns, or coastal areas, attract fewer points than those in less preferred areas such as rural and remote areas. Two schools in this study were in two transfer point areas, indicating that although they were in rural areas they were relatively close to regional centres and therefore in preferred locations. Two other schools were 7 point transfer schools, indicating they were in less preferred remote areas. The transfer rating points as they applied to the schools in this study are outlined in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10 Schools by transfer rating points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Transfer Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.3.2 Communities:

Four of the schools were not located within a town, but in an area with outlying properties and catered for children of the owners, or workers, at the surrounding stations and farms. The schools serviced areas which bred sheep and cattle, or grew cane, peanuts, fruit and cotton. While one school was only 6 kms from the nearest business centre, others were isolated by as much as 200 kms.

For those schools situated in a town, the population ranged from less than 100 up to 500. Population in the nearest business centre ranged from less than 500 to about 25,000, although two schools were within the business centre catchment of a regional city with a population of almost 60,000. Population statistics for the areas included in this study are shown in Table 5.11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School town population</th>
<th>Distance to nearest business centre</th>
<th>Business centre population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Number of schools</td>
<td>Kms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No town</td>
<td>&lt;100</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-500</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100-200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.3.3 Overview of communities

Although four of the schools were in geographic areas with no township, some communities boasted a general business which doubled as store, post office and service station. The following descriptions are provided for clarity, with identifying characteristics removed or camouflaged.

(1) The area Eve was moving into was classified on the socio-economic scale as being low to moderate and relied on cattle, cane and some banana farming. The nearest business centre with a population of almost 3,000 was 30 minutes’ drive away. The school was located in an area rather than a township, with the only other business being
a small general store which doubled as post office and petrol station. An established indigenous community was about 15 minutes drive away and 40% of the almost eighty students were indigenous. Other students were bused to school from outlying properties.

(2) Eighty students, who travelled a round trip of between 130 and 150 kilometres each day, were enrolled at Heather’s new school. There were few indigenous students. The town’s population was about 500, with another 150 in the wider district. The economy of the area was supported by raising cattle and sheep, as well as wool processing, which provided much of the local employment. The town was serviced by an hotel, a service station, butcher, supermarket, newsagent, service club, golf course, and tennis club. It also had the advantage of a hospital and visiting medical specialists, an ambulance service, and police station and the school’s swimming pool was used by the community. The nearest town, with a population of about 3,000, was 90km away.

(3) Alice’s new school was built in the late 1950s and it and the principal’s residence were the only buildings in the area. Population in the school community was declining as the dry weather conditions, coupled with a down turn in sorghum, wheat and cattle prices, forced families to move away. Ten students were enrolled at the school with a sole teaching principal, teacher aide and part time administration officer. At the commencement of the year there were no students in Year 6 and only one in each of Years 4 and 5. Specialist subjects, such as physical education and music, were taught by visiting teachers from the nearby town about 60 kms away, which claimed a population of 2,500.

(4) Janice’s new school’s student enrolment fluctuated around fifty. The school was located in a town with a population of about 500 and the nearest business centre, with a population of about 25,000, was almost 50 kms away. The area was primarily pastoral, with dairy cattle and some sugar cane. The business area of the community was represented by two hotels, a chemist, supermarket, butcher, service station, café, machinery sales, and tourist attractions. A manufacturing business also operated from the area and provided substantial employment. The town was serviced by a police station, fire service, service club and QCWA (Queensland Country Women’s Association).
(5) Nan’s new school was the only building in the area and was established in the 1960s to meet the demands of young families living in the geographic area. The community was involved in raising cattle and sheep as well as some grain crops. The nearest town, with a population of less than 800, was about 60 km away. Students attended from surrounding properties and the enrolment of fifteen was weighted strongly with female students. 67% of students were female, despite there being no females in the upper grades of Years 6 and 7. Conversely there were no male students in Years 1, 4, or 5.

(6) Sally’s school, which was established in the 1990s, started the year with an enrolment of 30 students, although enrolment numbers fluctuated due to the students living a transient lifestyle. This was one of the few schools in which male students outnumbered females (males 57%; females 43%) at several enrolment periods. The school student population was made up entirely of indigenous children, many of whom lived with their families in caravans or cars. There were communal showers and toilets and the school historically provided a breakfast programme for students. In addition to the school, the Royal Flying Doctor Service provided a medical clinic; while the town’s hotel served multiple functions of hotel, shop, post office and service station; and there were about a dozen homes for non-indigenous individuals. The non-indigenous community members worked at the school, the hotel, or the health clinic, but there was no mains electricity for the 80 people who lived in the town. In addition to the teaching principal, the school staff consisted of another classroom teacher, three teacher aides and specialist teachers who provided services on request. The nearest business centre with a population of 25,000 was 200 kms away. Given its isolation, the school rated as a seven point transfer location, which indicated teaching staff needed serve only two years before applying for transfer.

(7) Iris’s new school was situated 10 km from the nearest town which had a population of about 8,000. There were a few houses near the school but no identifiable township. The economy was sustained by growing beans, peanuts and corn and breeding pigs and cattle for market. Of the thirty students enrolled at the school 74% were females, with no males enrolled in years 4 and 7 and reduced numbers in the other grades. In addition to the teaching principal, school staff included another teacher, two teacher aides and an administrative assistant who worked part time. Specialist curriculum areas such as
physical education, music and LOTE (Languages Other Than English) were taught by visiting specialist teachers from the nearby town. The school was well resourced with sporting and playground equipment and was close to celebrating its 100th anniversary.

(8) Ann’s new school was built at the beginning of the 20th century and had been operational ever since. The local economy relied predominately on primary industry such as cattle and sheep and more recently, on growing cotton. About 50% of the town’s population of 100 was over retirement age and the population was influenced by seasonal employment of outsiders. Most of the school’s thirty students attended from pastoral properties and were regarded as having a relatively privileged socio-economic background. Families enjoyed yearly vacations away from the area and high school students attended boarding school rather than distance education. In addition to the school, the town was serviced by an hotel, a general store and a café. The nearest major business centre, with a population of about 500, was two hours drive away. In addition to the teaching principal, the school was staffed by a second teacher, an administration officer and three teacher aides. Given its isolation the school rated as a seven point transfer location, which indicated teaching staff needed serve only two years before applying for transfer.

(9) Nina’s school was one of the oldest in the study, having been established in the 1870s. About 500 people lived in the town or surrounding area, which was largely a broad acre rural farming district with grain crops, cotton, cattle and some coal mining. 15% of the population was indigenous and almost all the indigenous families were employed by the local council. The town’s post office was also the general store and there was an hotel, a mechanic, a trucking business, and a garden supply store. A few of the seventy school students were town children, but the majority attended from outlying properties. The school was staffed by the teaching principal, as well as two classroom teachers, an administrative officer and five teacher aides. The school was two hours travel to the nearest regional city with a population of 60,000.

(10) Due to the drought and closure of a mine, there was a downturn in the economy of Natalie’s new school. The population tended to be itinerant, with families moving in for a short time to take advantage of cheap housing rentals, but limited employment soon forced them to move elsewhere. The town was serviced by an hotel/motel, swimming
pool, a combined service station and general store, and a council office. The nearest major business centre with a population of 60,000 was 100 kms away. School students were a mixture of rural and town families and enrolment was usually maintained at about twenty with at least one student in each year level. In addition to the teaching principal, the school was staffed by two teacher aides and a part time administration officer.

(11) Fifteen students were enrolled in Daphne’s school, with at least one student in each year level. The town, with a population of about seventy, was supported by a timber industry and tourism. In earlier years the town relied on gold mining, but the mine closed in the mid-20th century. The nearest business centre, with a population of 2,000 was 40 kms away. The school was staffed by the teaching principal, two teacher aides, a part time administration officer and visiting specialist teachers for music, physical education and LOTE.

(12) Jill arrived at the school as it was making preparations to celebrate its 100th anniversary. School enrolments were maintained at around fifty, with many students travelling from outlying properties to attend. Due to distance and bus timetables, some students left home before 7 a.m. and did not leave the school again until 4 p.m., making a long day for young students. Apart from the teaching principal, other school staff included two teachers, three teacher aides and a part time administration officer. The school was also serviced by specialist teachers of LOTE, physical education and music on a roster basis. Within the town there was a general store, a café, an hotel, service station, community hall and rural fire service. The nearest business centre with a population of about 15,000 was 25 kms away.
5.4 Data Collection

This section provides the organisational elements of the research and the data collection method. It commences by explaining the ethical approval required by the two governing bodies, Griffith University and Education Queensland, followed by an explanation of the two phases of the study conducted over a one year period. This section concludes with an overview of the use of interviews, one of the most frequent data collection methods employed in Grounded Theory and used in this study.

5.4.1 Ethics Approval

A three phase process was navigated in order to gain access to the potential participants for this study. Approval was required from Griffith University, as well as agreement from Education Queensland to access their data base and to contact beginning principals. Finally, the female beginning teaching principals and stakeholders needed to be contacted and consent to participate.

An application to conduct the research was made to the Griffith University’s Human Research Ethics Committee and was approved under the proviso that potential participants were personally contacted by the researcher and informed of the aims and objectives of the research; that the names of potential stakeholders be provided by the school, but be individually contacted by the researcher; and that Education Queensland also approve the research (see Appendix A).

Accordingly, an application to conduct research in Education Queensland State Schools and Other Units was submitted to the Queensland Government’s Strategic Policy and Education Futures Division of the Department of Education and the Arts. Approval was granted on the conditions that approval to participate was received from the relevant principals; that principals had the right to decline participation; and that principals had the right to monitor any research activities conducted in the school (see Appendix B).

Finally, approval was sought from the teaching principals and stakeholders. Details of the manner in which the teaching principal and stakeholder participants were selected were described in section 5.3 above. Briefly, the teaching principals were identified through Education Queensland’s database, which listed all newly appointed principals.
according to school band level; the stakeholders’ names were later provided by the teaching principals. In accordance with Griffith University’s guidelines the potential participants were contacted by telephone to seek their participation and were informed of the aims of the research. Upon agreement to participate a written explanation was e-mailed to them outlining the study and providing the contact details of relevant Griffith University personnel. In addition, each participant was provided with an information sheet, a biography page providing basic information and a Statement of Informed Consent which they were asked to sign and return to the researcher (see Appendices C & D).

In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used throughout this dissertation. Specific, or identifiable statements made by participants have been generalized as much as possible, without losing the substance or contextual detail. The aim is to provide a realistic account that is embedded in the principal’s day to day practice, so that aspiring, or practising, female teaching principals can identify with, or relate to the information provided, but cannot determine who took part in the study. It should also be noted that although the teaching principals provided names of potential stakeholders, they were not advised which individuals participated.

5.4.2 Phases of the study

In the first phase of this study, telephone interviews were conducted with the twelve female beginning teaching principals and seventeen stakeholders shortly before the teaching principals commenced their new roles. The interviews sought to determine the teaching principals’ insights, knowledge and expectations of the role, while the stakeholders’ interviews sought to discover the expectations they held of the teaching principal.

The second phase of the research commenced at the end of the teaching principal’s first year when teaching principals and stakeholders were again interviewed to determine the year’s progress. Referring to the interviews from the beginning of the year, the researcher was able to re-visit issues or comments to determine if perceptions had been influenced by the year’s events.
5.4.2.1 Phase 1- Beginning of the year

Teaching principal participants

As detailed earlier, the female teaching principals were identified from Education Queensland’s data base of successful applicants for teaching principal positions in rural and remote Band 5 and Band 6 schools. The successful female applicants were contacted by telephone, the study’s aims explained, and their participation requested. A letter outlining the topics to be addressed, a formal consent form and a biographical questionnaire were e-mailed or posted to those who agreed to participate. The biographical information form asked for details such as:

- Age
- Qualifications
- Years of teaching prior to principalship
- Career aspirations
- Training received for Principalship
- Former knowledge of small communities
- Understanding of leadership
- Understanding and expectations of the teaching principal role
- Perceptions of skills necessary to work in a small school community
- Opinion regarding the skills necessary to be a supportive and effective leader

Prior to the commencement of the research, during the explanation of the research design, participants were advised that the interviews would be typed into a computer as they spoke. This method of recording the interviews was chosen, rather than note taking or tape recording, in order to fully document individual comments. In contrast to those researchers who suggested that the use of a tape recorder was intrusive in an interview (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Holton, 2004; Lincoln and Guba, 1985), this research followed the example of Patton (2002) who stated that a tape recorder was, “indispensable” (p 348) and Dick (2002) who claimed that tape recorders, “… interfere with rapport initially, but usually not for long” (p 5). Unfortunately, despite the intention to use a tape recorder, the poor quality of telephone reception in some rural and remote areas, made this impractical, resulting in the tape recorder being eschewed in favour of direct
computer keying. The researcher was a speed typist and by using a typing shorthand of eliminating pronouns, definite and indefinite articles, and conjunctions, etc was able to keep pace with the speaker.

All interviews with the teaching principals were conducted by telephone by the researcher from her private residence. Interviews with ten of the twelve teaching principals occurred during the December/January school vacation period, while one occurred on the first student free day in January and another at the end of the first week of the first term. The interview times were selected by the participants to suit their personal circumstances.

The interviews were informal and semi-structured and varied in length from sixty minutes to one hundred minutes. A transcript of the interview was e-mailed to them within 36 hours for their approval and verification. The semi structured nature of the interviews permitted the researcher to ask in-depth questions relevant to the research objectives or to elicit additional information presented by the participants. Probing questions were used if insufficient details were provided. In particular, additional information was sought regarding their perceptions of the role and duties of a teaching principal; the skills required; their concerns about the role; their understanding of school culture and its impact; their expectations; and if they considered that their gender was relevant to the role of teaching principal.

At the commencement of this study Education Queensland was divided into ten regions; seven regions were represented in stage one. Two regions were each represented by three beginning principals, one with two participants, and four regions each with one participant.

*Stakeholder Participants*

School stakeholders were identified as other teaching staff, teacher aides, administrative assistants, Parents and Citizens (P&C) Committee members and district office staff. The participating teaching principals were asked to advise their staff and communities that the research was taking place and to submit names of those who might be interested in
participating. In order to maintain confidentiality the teaching principals were not advised which stakeholders agreed to take part in the study. Overall, seventeen stakeholders participated, representing ten of the twelve small school communities and included seven teachers, three teacher aides, four administrative assistants, two parents and one middle manager from one of the district offices.

Due to time constraints, interviews with stakeholders occurred during the teaching principal’s first term at the school. A similar format was followed for interviewing stakeholders as for teaching principals. All interviews were informal and semi-structured and conducted by telephone by the researcher from her home. They varied in length from fifty minutes to seventy minutes. Stakeholders were initially asked to describe the local geographic area and to provide basic biographical details. They were then asked to expand on comments relating to the skills required of a successful female teaching principal and the expectations they held of her; prior knowledge of the teaching principal; strategies she could use to become part of the community; and whether gender would influence the community’s acceptance.

Transcripts of the interviews were e-mailed or posted to the stakeholders for verification within 36 hours of the interview. One stakeholder requested that comments she made about her personal life be deleted. There were no other changes.

5.4.2.2 Phase 2 – End of year

Teaching principal participants

During the six week summer vacation period at the end of their first year as teaching principal the twelve participants were re-contacted for a second interview. Eleven of the original twelve participants agreed to be interviewed by telephone; the twelfth asked to be excluded due to work commitments.

The interviews at the end of the year followed a similar format to those at the beginning of the year, being informal and semi-structured and typed directly into a computer by the researcher. Interviews ranged from 100 minutes to 162 minutes and each was of longer duration than the first interview. Additional interview times ranged from twenty-
four minutes to ninety-two minutes. A copy of the transcript was e-mailed to each participant within 24 hours for verification. 

Essentially, the end of year telephone interviews sought to determine whether the preceding year altered the perceptions that practising female teaching principals held of the role. Statements made during the beginning of the year interviews were repeated to the participants to determine whether those statements continued to hold true. For example, if the participant commented at the beginning of the year that her gender would not influence acceptance by the community, but at the end of the year stated she was not accepted because she was a female, the researcher prompted her to clarify the reasons she changed her opinion. In addition, the researcher sought to reveal the personal and professional impact of the year on each individual. As part of the semi-structured nature of the interview information was sought either directly, or indirectly, about their experiences, including the matching of expectations with the reality of the role; challenges faced; changes in understanding of leadership; the significance of gender in the community; their most valued support networks; and if, given a second chance, what they would change in the way they operated during the year.

Following the end of year interviews the researcher maintained yearly email contact with the teaching principals to determine their progress, to keep them updated with the analysis of the research and to determine the impact of the year’s experiences on their careers. Appendix E outlines the careers of each of the teaching principals over the ensuing five year period.

Stakeholder Participants

During first term of the teaching principal’s second year attempts were made to contact the seventeen stakeholders for a second interview. However, some stakeholders left the school community area and could not be contacted, others did not respond to requests by telephone, letters, or e-mail and others asked to be excluded. Consequently, only eight stakeholders participated in the interviews, seven of whom were females. Three of the eight were teachers, three were administrative officers, one was a teacher aide and one was a parent. Interviews followed the same procedure as previously, that is, they were semi structured; conducted by telephone by the researcher from her home; were
typed directly into a computer; and copies were e-mailed for verification. The interviews at the end of the year varied between twenty-eight minutes and sixty minutes and were of shorter duration than the interviews at the beginning of the year.

The stakeholders were reminded of their earlier comments and when responses differed they were asked for clarification. In addition, if they did not address certain topics, or their comments were insufficient, they were prompted with questions regarding their perception of the teaching principal’s strengths and weaknesses; ability to meet expectations; and the impact of her gender on the community.

As interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study, the following section provides an explanation for their use.

5.4.3 Interviews

Interviews are one of the major data collection strategies used in grounded theory and were used during the two stages of this research. In discussing their use Hutchinson (1997) stated:

*In-depth interviews of the participants lend meaning to their observed experiences. Observing, by itself, is never enough because it begs misinterpretation. Interviews permit researchers to verify, clarify, or alter what they thought happened, to achieve a full understanding of an incident, and to take into account the “lived” experience of participants. Grounded theories are guided by the assumption that people do, in fact, have patterns of experience. They order and make sense of their environment, although their world may appear disordered or nonsensical to the observer* (p. 125).

According to Merriam (1988, p 72), the purpose of interviewing is to “enter into the other person’s perspective”, while Bogdan and Biklen (1992) claimed an interview was a conversation between two people, directed by one, with a definite purpose of obtaining information from the other. Essentially, interviews provide the opportunity for a direct focus on one person and their perspectives and afford insight into their world (Zeldin and Pajares, 2000). As such, interviews should focus on the meaning individuals ascribe to the events they describe and should not be challenging or threatening to the interview participants.
At a fundamental level interviews are a method by which individuals express their emotions and reactions to various situations, providing data to better understand what it is like for each person living that particular experience. In the process of gathering the data society becomes more conscious of another aspect of the human experience (van Manen, 1990). Put another way, interviews seek to explore and gather experiential narrative material which serves as a resource to develop a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon (Danzig, 1997). Danzig observed that using individual narratives allowed for reconstructing events which have already happened, thereby providing the opportunity for reflection on the informal systems of beliefs and myths, relationships and community culture. This research supported Danzig’s observations. The interviews permitted participants to express their personal attitudes and beliefs, as well as highlight the community’s culture, which indicated whether a pattern of characteristics existed that fitted their concept of a successful female teaching principal.

However, van Manen (1990) sounded a note of caution about the unqualified use of interviews for data collection:

"...experiential accounts or lived experience descriptions - whether caught in oral or in written discourse - are never identical to lived experience itself. All recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already transformations of those experiences...We need to find access to life's living dimensions while realizing that the meanings we bring to the surface from the depths of life’s oceans have already lost the natural quiver of their undisturbed existence." (p 54)

Despite the concern raised by van Manen (1990), the major source of data collection for this research was through the employment of telephone interviews with female beginning teaching principals and school stakeholders.

The use of telephone interviews has been supported by other researchers, who highlighted the value of focusing the conversation in the absence of non-visual cues and of not intruding on the participant’s personal space (Holt, 2010; Stephens, 2007). In this study one of the advantages of conducting the interviews by telephone was that the interviewer could concentrate on typing as the participant spoke, without interrupting...
the speaker or needing to concentrate on normal social responses. In addition, knowing
the conversation was being typed as they spoke, the participants tended to pause
periodically to allow the interviewer time to keep pace and in the process adding to their
story, or providing further insight into the one already told. Three other, more pragmatic
reasons, contributed to the use of telephone rather than face-to-face interviews in this
study. The phone interviews enabled the conversations to occur in the participants’
personal setting with the privacy to speak frankly. This was especially important as the
teaching principals were on vacation and scattered throughout Queensland. The second
reason consisted of a number of variables - the geographic vastness of Queensland and
the positioning of the school communities precluded travel for short occasions; the wet
season coincided with the timing of the interviews, preventing access to some areas; and
a lack of anonymity for stakeholders if the researcher was seen in the area. Finally, the
researcher worked in a full time capacity as a staff psychologist, providing a counselling
and support service to school staff across an extensive geographic area, which required
her to be available to staff during school term. Personal visits to the communities were
therefore ruled as impractical.

To gain the maximum benefit from the interviews, each was semi-structured with open-
ended questions, but followed if necessary, by probing questions to more fully explore
or clarify the responses (Dick, 2005). The semi structured nature of the interviews
allowed respondents to express themselves at some length, while at the same time
offering boundaries and structure. Essentially, the interviews followed Stewart and
Cash’s (1994) topical sequence method and Judd, Smith and Kidder’s (1991) funnel
principal. The topical sequence technique used the interviews natural progression to
develop themes which provided the researcher the freedom to adapt to the participants’
responses and further probe their answers. Judd, Smith and Kidder’s (1991) funnel
principal advocated commencing the interview with general questions which were easy
and unchallenging for the participant. The questions progressively focused on more
specific questions with each one containing probes to assist in the focus. For example,
in this research an open ended question to the teaching principal could be, “Tell me
about your perceptions of school leadership”. If the response was general or theoretical,
a follow-up question could ask, “How will you incorporate that into your style in the
school?” For stakeholders, an open ended question could be, “Tell me about your
expectations of the school principal” with a follow-up question investigating areas of social interaction, educational ability or organisation, depending on the original answer.

By listening to the twelve female beginning teaching principals initially respond with enthusiasm and positive expectations and later to stories of the reality of their situations, the researcher was better placed to understand their perspectives. Later, through data analysis, it was possible to determine if similar themes and structures made up the experiences for all twelve participants (van Manen, 1990). Although the teaching principals lived in diverse communities, the interviews provided the opportunity to showcase overall similar themes and structures that highlighted the intensity of the experience for each.

According to Glaser (1998), data collection and data analysis are not separate steps in the research process, but occur concurrently as a continuous cycle, leading to the eventual generation of a theory. Therefore, having discussed the manner in which data was collected for this research, the following section will detail the way in which it was analysed in order to propose a theory relevant to understanding the experiences of beginning female teaching principals in small rural and remote school communities.

5.5 Data Analysis

One of the objectives of grounded theory research is to discover themes and categories within the data. However, before considering the development of categories the data must be coded. All data is coded at the commencement of analysis in order to understand the issue and how it is being addressed. The researcher may use as many codes as possible to fit the different incidents and new codes emerge with each new incident (Dick, 2005). In this way the researcher is able to theoretically sample the content prior to becoming selective and focusing on a particular issue.
Chapter 5 Research Design

5.5 Coding

5.5.1 Open coding

Coding is concerned with identifying, naming, categorising and describing the information unearthed in the text. Each line, sentence and paragraph is read in an effort to discover what is happening in the circumstance under investigation. Put simply, coding fractures the data, confining it to categories that eventually help explain what is happening in the data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Holton, 2004). Essentially, a code provides a condensed, abstract view of the data. According to Glaser (1995), two stages of coding exist - open and selective. Open coding is used in the initial stages of analysis and is referred to as an “open” process, as the data are examined without making any prior assumptions about the outcome, but has the purpose of developing themes from the data; while selective codes are open codes which have shown repeated relationships with one another (Glaser, 1995). During this process events and interactions are compared with other events and interactions in order to identify similarities and differences. The researcher identifies and names the conceptual categories which emerge from the data and groups them for identification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The goal of this process is to develop descriptive categories of concepts and themes which form the framework for later analysis. The categories are gradually modified or replaced during the stages of analysis that follow (Hoepfl, 1997).

In effect, coding serves the purpose of grouping the data to form a theory to explain its relevance and to categorise data rather than quantify them (Glaser and Holton, 2004). Glaser and Holton suggested that during open coding the researcher should ask questions such as:

- What category does this incident indicate?
- What is actually happening in the data?
- What is the main concern being faced by the participants?
- What accounts for the continual resolving of this concern? (p 9)

Similarly, Dick (2005) suggested that identifying themes in interview transcripts would be simpler if the researcher asked a standard set of questions and repeated those same
questions for each interview. An example of those questions could be, “What is going on here?” and “How is the person managing that situation” (p 6).

These questions were consistently used during this research. When the teaching principals described their leadership expectations, the question “What is going on here?” suggested inexperience and naïveté for those without prior leadership experience. For example, in the interviews at the beginning of the year Eve referred to encouraging and motivating stakeholders to accept new ideas by using “the power of bullshit”. She perceived no objections to her leadership style, apart from her own frustrations at changes not happening quickly enough. At the end of the year interviews the same question about leadership expectations elicited a different response from Eve. She replaced encouragement and motivation with having to, “...hit them across the head with a baseball bat and say you are not doing the job.” Throughout both sets of semi-structured interviews the participants were asked the same questions, so that comparisons could be drawn across the time frame. During the coding process after the end of the year interviews stories of tiredness and lack of confidence led to the researcher questioning, “What category does this incident indicate?” and “What is the main concern being faced by the participants?” Both questions lead to the identification of a common theme of overwhelming workload.

The intent of open coding therefore is to provide categories of responses from every line of the narrative. It begins with line-by-line coding of the data to identify relevant events and emerging themes (Hutchinson, 1997). Line by line coding forces the researcher to verify categories and eliminates the possibility of “pet” themes and ideas unless they fit within the identified themes (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p 10). This research met those requirements, as data analysis concentrated only on the content of the participants’ comments and allowed the data to speak for itself.

Open coding permits the researcher to determine which data to collect next in order to find direction for the study, but before focusing on one particular issue (Glaser & Holton, 2004). It also allows the data to be labeled and organised for comparison and retrieval and for the development of categories of themes to emanate from the data, but without making assumptions about them (Burns, 2000; Kerlins, 2002). Consequently, transcripts of interviews, such as those used in this research, are repeatedly read and
dissected in a meaningful way, while keeping the relationships between them intact until patterns in the data become obvious (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

For instance, in this research the interviews were concerned with the way female beginning teaching principals adjusted to living in rural and remote communities and the characteristics that made them acceptable in those communities. The coding of the interviews included factors related to this. In all, forty-five codes were initially identified in the teaching principals’ interviews at the commencement of the year and were eventually subsumed under seven categories. They included issues concentrating on (a) teaching experience; (b) familiarity with living in rural and remote areas; (c) expectations; (d) leadership in its many forms; (e) goals and plans for the immediate and long term future; (f) gender and age; and (g) duties and skills of a teaching principal. The stakeholder interviews at the commencement of the year resulted in twenty-three codes which concentrated on (a) expectations of the teaching principal; (b) experiences with previous teaching principals; and (c) positive and negative qualities of the person in the role.

5.5.1.2 Selective coding

Selective coding is the process of choosing one category to be the core category and relating all other categories to that category (Courtney, Babchuk & Jhr, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Hence the core category explains the behaviour of the participants or the phenomena under investigation. Glaser and Holton (2004) advised that selective coding commenced when open coding ceased, so it delimited coding to only those variables that related to the core category in sufficiently significant ways as to produce a prudent theory. Or as Jones et al, (2005) commented, selective coding filters the data so “...only the pertinent passages of a transcript are used and coded” (p. 8). For that reason, selective coding begins only after the researcher is sure the core variable has been discovered and therefore is most likely to occur in the latter part of the study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Holton, 2004). For instance, in this study, leadership was determined to be a core category and explained the behaviour of the teaching principals in their first year in the role. The other categories, such as the skills they perceived necessary to be a leader, their confidence levels as they performed in the role, their past
experiences and the training they received, all contributed to the core category of leadership. Similarly, from the forty-five open codes, the core category of personal characteristics included issues such as anticipated stressors and management strategies; personal support networks; approaches to conflict resolution; and personal philosophies regarding education.

5.5.2 Constant comparative method

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967) the constant comparison method refers to comparing each piece of data with all other pieces of data in order to highlight as much behaviour variation as possible. Within the context of grounded theory, the constant comparative method identifies similarities and differences and delivers conceptualisations of a social process which explains the behaviour of those involved in the research environment (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Partington, 2000; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

In discussing the constant comparative method Glaser and Strauss (1967) made the point that unlike quantitative research, the analysis of data does not seek factual descriptions and the opportunities to generalise from the findings are limited. Corbin and Strauss (1990) observed, “... it is generalizable insofar as it specifies conditions that are linked through action/interaction with definite consequences” (p 15).

Using the constant comparative method, the researcher compares each piece of data as it is coded, making it easier to find emerging patterns. A combination of two manual techniques was used in this research to search for patterns or themes. These processes were “pawing”, during which coloured highlighter pens were used to mark significant words or passages of data and “eyeballing” the data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p 14). The researcher read each transcript several times in order to become familiar with the content, before certain comments were highlighted and recorded as significant to the topic. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) commented, this manual identification of data may not appear to be a particularly scientific way of analysing data and can be time consuming, but it allowed the researcher a more intimate knowledge of the stories,
minute details and nuances. It also highlighted areas which needed to be revisited and re-questioned.

Through the use of manual analysis the researcher in this study was able to code the data while seeking patterns of interaction. The researcher compared incident with incident, distinguished similarities and differences and identified particular categories within the data that had something in common (Merriam, 1998). For instance, the similar responses from the communities to the teaching principals’ gender were highlighted as significant. During the constant comparative process each category was identified and compared with other categories so that particular categories tended to emerge with high frequency and as the research continued they connected to other categories (Dick, 2005; Wadham, 2009). The comments from those teaching principals not personally subjected to overt comments about their gender, but nevertheless being aware of its significance, was one such incident. According to Merriam (1998), the result of breaking down the data into categories was to reflect the purpose of the research and provide answers to the research questions. Constant comparison of the data therefore continued until no new information was reported and core categories emerged (Jones, et al, 2005).

5.5.3 Memoing

Within grounded theory a memo is a note the researcher writes about a category, or relationship between categories, which is detected during analysis (Dick, 2005). Memos may be post-it notes commenting on something in the text that needs further investigation, or a larger paper developing the theoretical implications of a discovery. Dick (2005) claimed that because grounded theory assumes the theory is concealed in the data, when an idea occurs during analysis the researcher should pause and write a memo in order to retain the idea.

Similarly, Glaser (1978) argued that memos were an essential part of data analysis and that they were, “the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding” (p. 83). He added that because memos did not need to be prepared or stored in a consistent order they allowed the researcher the freedom to record ideas as they arose. Later, Glaser and Holton (2004) argued that memos
generated a theoretical outline, or framework, for the development of a theory to address the phenomenon under investigation.

In this research memos played a large part in data analysis. The researcher used post-it notes to record overall impressions and ideas arising from the interview transcripts. Questions relating to the participants’ comments in the interviews at the beginning of the year were recorded on notes to follow up at the end of year interviews. In particular, when Alice stated that she intended giving all her attention to changing the school’s maths programme, a memo was added to her file to query whether she achieved that goal. Likewise, Sally commented at the beginning of the year that she expected the community to have a “family atmosphere”. A memo was added to her file to query the reality of that statement; while Heather’s initial observation, “It’s a close knit community” rated a memo to query if she maintained the same opinion at the year’s end. Other memos queried the connection between a comment made by a stakeholder and a conflicting comment made by the teaching principal. For example, there was some disparity between some stakeholders’ views of gender compared to other stakeholders as well as to the teaching principals’ perceptions. These comments rated a memo to investigate further. Essentially, memos were used to reconsider and revise emerging theories during data collection and analysis and to help in the process of breaking down the data and developing a theory.

5.5.4 Core category

The culminating activity in grounded theory research is identifying the core category which represents the area under investigation and leads to generation of a theory to explain the phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The core category reflects the patterns of behaviour essential to the topic and should be valid in other settings and structures and stable over time (Jones et al, 2005). The core category emerges only after extensive analysis of the data by comparing incident to incident and later, incidents to categories through the constant comparative method (Glaser & Holton, 2004). According to Glaser (1978), “The core category accounts for most of the variation in a pattern of behaviour” (p. 93).
Meanwhile, Strauss (1987) described the core category as containing six primary features, including: it consistently repeats throughout the data; it links the data; it explains the variations in the data; it has implications for a formal theory; the theory is able to advance as the core category becomes more detailed; and it allows for maximum variation and analysis. While, Wadham (2009) suggested just three primary features - it frequently appeared; it contained relationships with other categories; and was essential to the development of the theory.

For those reasons, Dick (2005) cautioned that it was imperative all data be extensively analysed to ensure nothing new could be revealed before finally deciding on the core category. He added that it was unwise to choose a core category too early in the data collection, since coding of data which does not relate to the core category, ceases when it has been identified. The discovery of a core category is therefore the goal of the researcher and is essential to a grounded theory study, since it illuminates the “main theme” of the participants’ behaviour and explicates what is occurring in the data (Glaser, 1978, p 94).

In essence, to propose a theory the researcher must engage in three major processes – code the interview responses to uncover similarities and differences emanating from the data; develop a list of categories, or central ideas, by building connections within categories; and finally, moving from categories into themes, resulting in a small number of core categories representing the data in such a way that saturation is reached and no additional data can be found (Cohen & Manion, 1992; Fassinger, 2005; Glaser, 1992; Lichtman, 2006).

In seeking to discover the core category, Corbin and Strauss (1990) indicated that the researcher should consistently reflect on three questions: (1) what is the main idea presented in the research? (2) what is all the action/interaction about? and (3) how can the variation between and among the categories be explained? (p 14)

During the analysis for this study these questions provided a clear focus for the researcher. In considering, “what is all the action/interaction about?” it was essential that the meanings the participants’ ascribed to events were examined, not the meanings attributed by the researcher (Creswell, 2009). For example, during the analysis of
interview responses it eventuated that five teaching principals claimed not to be happy with the isolation of living in rural and remote areas, but six claimed they were either happy or “don’t mind it”. The question for the researcher therefore became, “How could the variation be explained?”

Seven categories eventually emerged during the data analysis of this research and were later used in the write up of the findings. This was consistent with Jones et al (2005) who suggested that a collection of categories may emerge from the research and should be used in presentation of findings. As discussed in 5.5.1.1 and 5.5.1.2 above, the forty-five open codes which emerged from the teaching principal interviews resulted in seven categories:

- Leadership
- School culture and teaching experience
- Administrative workload
- Gender and age
- Community and rural living
- Expectations of community and self
- Personal characteristics

Findings relating to these categories will be discussed in Chapter 6.

5.5.5 Internal validity

There are several risks to interpretation of any data. For example, threats to validity can occur as a result of the researcher's own biases, opinions and beliefs if she attaches her own words and meanings to the interviews and observations (Maxwell, 1996; Yin, 2003). As a result, the procedures used in data analysis can influence the validity of conclusions drawn (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Qualitative researchers assume the presence of multiple realities and attempt to represent those realities adequately (Hoepfl, 1997). Patton (2002) claimed that internal validity depends on the richness of the data gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher rather than on sample size. Patton went on to say that the credibility of the data can be enhanced through triangulation of data. Triangulation involves the
comparison of data from different phases of the study and of all the participants (Edwards & Skinner, 2009).

To ensure the validity of data in this research, the researcher repeated and reformulated various questions to compare their degree of validity. Questions were worded similarly in interviews at both the beginning of the year and end of year interviews to avoid misinterpretation. For example, “What skills are required to be an effective teaching principal?” was asked at both interviews in order for the question to have the same meaning on both occasions. Out of necessity some questions were reworded to account for the time frame, such as at the beginning of the year, “What support network do you have?” became at the end of year, “What support networks did you call on during the year?” However, this change was not considered to have a negative impact on interpretation.

Other strategies to enhance internal validity in this study included clarifying all comments at the conclusion of each interview and e-mailing or posting a transcript of the interview to the participants so they could make additions or edits and validate their comments. No changes were made by the participants. This went some way toward overcoming any inaccurate representations the researcher may have made in the course of typing the interviews (Maxwell, 1996). In addition, as mentioned previously, the researcher did not bring preconceptions into the research, but rather a curiosity about the experiences of female teaching principals and therefore could not select data to fit her preconceptions (Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter was presented in four sections. The first section provided an overview of the methodological framework that supported this study and defended its use. It provided justification for the qualitative research nature of the study and the use of grounded theory as a framework. It made the point that grounded theory uses an inductive strategy to identify the structure of human relationships within their environments. To accomplish this it employs a package of research methods that incorporate a concurrent process of data collection. Most importantly, researchers
approach the field of study without pre-conceptions and a willingness to generate theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The second section of this chapter provided a description of the teaching principals and stakeholders who took part in the study and the communities in which they lived. It outlined the ages, backgrounds, teaching experience and prior small community experience of the teaching principals as well as providing a snapshot of the stakeholders and small school communities.

The third section outlined the organisational aspects of obtaining ethical clearance from Griffith University and Education Queensland. It detailed the two phases that made up this study and the way in which the interviews were conducted, as well as reviewing the use of interviews to gather data.

The final section described the analysis of the data. It included descriptions of open and selective coding, the constant comparative method, memoing and the method for developing categories and ensuring validity was addressed.

The next chapter will address the findings collected in this study through interviews with the twelve female teaching principals and the community stakeholders. It considers the data related to the seven themes identified during analysis of the interviews and offers comprehensive detail from the participants about their experiences as female beginning teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities.
CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores distinctive features of the twelve teaching principals’ accounts of their first year as principal in a small school and is presented in two sections. The first section presents data from interviews with the teaching principals and stakeholders immediately prior to commencement of their first year as principal; while the second section contains data from interviews with eleven of the original twelve teaching principals and eight of the seventeen stakeholders, at the conclusion of the same year. Both sections address the seven categories identified in Chapter 5, that is, leadership; school and teaching; administrative duties; gender and age; community and rural living experiences; community and personal expectations; and the personal characteristics that impact on acceptance.

To aid the reader in identifying the teaching principals discussed in this chapter, a summary of their age groups, marital status and teaching experiences at the commencement of the research, is shown in Table 6.1. A similar summary of the seventeen stakeholders is shown in Table 6.2. These tables may be used as a quick guide and reference point to each participant.
### Table 6.1 Teaching principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Teaching Experience (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nan</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daphne</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Married</td>
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Pseudonyms have been used for all participants

### Table 6.2 Stakeholders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Years associated with school and/or community</th>
<th>Teaching Principal</th>
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<tr>
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<td>41-50</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Heather</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sally</td>
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<td>Cathy</td>
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<td>41-50</td>
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<td>Eve</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ann</td>
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<td>Teacher</td>
<td>41-50</td>
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Pseudonyms have been used for all participants
6.2 Beginning of year interviews

The following section presents comments from the interviews, as they relate to the seven core categories, with relevant quotes highlighted by italics. The quotes serve to illustrate the individuality and richness of the teaching principals’ voices.

The themes are presented graphically in Figure 6.1.
Figure 6.1 Teaching principals’ themes at beginning of first year
In the course of the interviews with the teaching principals the reader will observe that reference is occasionally made to the School Opinion Survey (SOS). Briefly, the SOS is a questionnaire distributed to a randomly selected group of parents in medium to large state schools and to all parents in small schools in August each year. It is also completed by students in Years 5, 6, and 7 and by all staff. Questions address satisfaction levels in areas including pedagogy, behaviour, educational outcomes, relationships, morale, use of technology and satisfaction with the facilities.

The purpose of the SOS is to notify departmental and school personnel where improvements need to occur and provides a snapshot of how the school is viewed by staff, parents and students. Ostensibly the data provided may be used to reflect on and track the progress the school has made and for the principal to assess stakeholders’ satisfaction levels.

**6.2 Leadership**

Comments were identified as significant to the theme of leadership if they referred to general leadership skills, or pertained specifically to the leadership of teaching principals. These two concepts were seen to contrast in certain aspects. General leadership skills were spoken of in terms of philosophy and ideology, while the leadership of a teaching principal was spoken of in terms of more utilitarian skills germane to working in a small school community. The leadership theme also included observations and apprehensions about the individual’s own leadership style; perceived training; and the obstacles they were aware could impact on their leadership in the first year in the school.

**6.2.1 Skills required for effective school leadership**

All twelve of the female beginning teaching principals observed that a successful leader, of any organisation, needed good communication skills in order to be trusted. Heather added that it was essential for a leader to be fair and equitable in her communication and to have the same set of rules for everyone.
Other leadership skills included time management, flexibility and a sound knowledge of school documents and education initiatives, although Alice cautioned that successful leaders did not, “jump on bandwagons”, but chose a project and followed it through. At the same time, Eve suggested a successful leader possessed patience, a quality she found difficult to master. She believed it took patience to encourage people to accept new or different ways of thinking, but if they were convinced it was their idea, they were more likely to take ownership and make it happen. Janice agreed that a leader required patience, but unlike Eve, believed she was a patient person. Janice added other leadership characteristics, such as being decisive, organised, energetic and having a sense of humour; while Nan believed that successful leaders provided guidance and offered stakeholders options, rather than asking what they wanted; and Jill saw a primary characteristic of a successful leader as the ability to build positive relationships.

Meanwhile, according to Nina and Ann, diplomacy and being “delicate” when working with all stakeholders were crucial components in being a good leader and Ann added that treating people fairly and non-judgmentally, but at the same time remaining in control without being dictatorial, was essential. These comments were similar to Daphne’s, who suggested a successful leader blended parents and students into the school and kept a finger on the pulse of events.

As teaching principals, they perceived their leadership extended into managing the school’s physical resources and because the administrative assistants only worked part time, they envisaged completing clerical tasks as well as other duties. Therefore Heather, Natalie and Janice advocated ongoing education in “the little management issues”, such as closing gates, sorting mail and being vigilant with safety. Likewise, Jill observed that understanding the administrative tasks was essential as it was vital the budget aligned with the resource needs of the school and that they were maintained in good condition. Likening the role to a “Jack of all trades”, Ann stated that teaching principals needed to know “everything”, while meeting the high expectations of others, as well as her own elevated expectations. Despite all this Janice stated:

*It can be very rewarding. It’s lifelong learning and it’s challenging. You need to be assertive at times with the community. Time management is crucial. There are times when I will pull my hair out.*
The administrative workload was referred to by all the teaching principals, although Nan stated that they should not become “bogged down” in the paperwork and become stressed about completing it. At the same time, Janice and Alice argued that because the teaching principals were held accountable for the financial state of the school, they needed to understand the budget and how school finances operated.

Several participants commented on the need for a leader to have effective time management strategies, or as Alice stated, “Make sure the paperwork does not mount up”. While Eve observed that they should not allow unplanned events to distract them from their work in the classroom and that by being well organised there would be minimum disruption. However, Iris admitted that organisation was not one of her strengths and required effort.

In concert with good organizational skills and by the very nature of the role, they required exceptional teaching skills. They argued that a teaching principal needed to be a better classroom teacher than a non-teaching principal; needed to communicate more with parents about students’ academic achievements than non-teaching principals; and have a thorough knowledge of the whole of school curriculum. Alice and Nan added that by communicating with parents about the students’ progress, parents were more likely to be happy and they could expect less conflict.

A different perspective was offered by Sally. Her school was in an almost exclusively indigenous community and she was aware of the importance of fitting into the community. She planned on being positive about what was being achieved, rather than highlighting the negatives and believed her outgoing personality would work well in a predominantly shy community.

Characteristics such as being willing to admit to not knowing everything, being willing to listen and learn and working within personal limitations, were also recognised as contributing to successful school leadership. For Eve, this translated into forgiving herself for not achieving everything in the first six months and accepting that she would be criticised, no matter what she did. While for Heather it meant separating her private life from her school role, in order to maintain sanity; and for Janice it meant spending non-school time mixing in the community rather than travelling away at weekends.
Few of the participants were experienced in managing staff, but the ability to do so was seen as a requirement for an effective teaching principal. Within this context, Jill, who had some experience, reported that the secret was to answer questions, or direct them to where they might find the answers. However, Alice saw the barrier to staff management as the older staff members’ perceptions of her youth.

6.2.1.2 Personal leadership style

The participants’ personal leadership style was influenced by their lack of previous experience and several expressed a lack of confidence and a sense of inadequacy about their leadership, from the perspective of the administrative demands of the role. Overall, they possessed limited knowledge of the financial aspects and were concerned that they would be viewed as inadequate, or that they would “fail” as a leader by “missing something”.

Nevertheless, in describing their leadership style most of the participants included aspects of communication. For instance, Heather described herself as, “leading through communication”. Although she was uncertain about being a leader and did not know the “best way” to undertake it, she believed that by communicating with stakeholders she would learn.

Others referred to building relationships with stakeholders through communication. Eve described her communication style as, “a seed planter”, planting ideas in others’ minds so they would take ownership of the idea and work to make it happen. However, with her admitted lack of patience, she acknowledged that sometimes she became so frustrated she wanted to scream at individuals to stop thinking and just do something. Meanwhile, Ann viewed her style as consultative, but was concerned that she would be expected to be a community leader, as well as school leader. She accepted the role in order to be “the boss” at the school - to control decisions; to direct how money was spent; and to determine how the school operated - not to take an active role in the community.

On the other hand, Alice and Daphne discussed their leadership in terms of their classroom interactions. Alice admitted that when she first graduated as a teacher her classroom leadership style was authoritarian, but she believed she had since softened
her approach. She intended relying on long-serving staff for advice and on the School Opinion Survey for stakeholders’ opinions of her leadership. One of Alice’s primary concerns was that her youth would lead community members to perceive her as too inexperienced to be a leader. She was also apprehensive about forming friendships, or accepting invitations for social activities, but at the same time, did not wish to appear aloof by refusing.

Janice recognised that she could be authoritarian, but she also used a co-operative and persuasive style, “You get them to go with you, you get them working with you. Treat them fairly”. As with other participants, Janice was concerned that due to lack of time to complete the duties she may appear inefficient. Meanwhile, Sally made the point that her leadership style included motivating others and humour, but accepted that she needed to relax and be more flexible; and like Alice, wanted to learn how to divest herself of the principal’s role when socialising in the community.

As an acting principal for the year Nina was uncertain about her leadership style. She was aware that living temporarily in a small, close knit community could make it difficult to be accepted as a leader and on a personal level, she was apprehensive about the administrative tasks and about managing staff and other stakeholders. Likewise, Nan expressed concern about failing with the administrative workload and the impact it could have on her future career, “I hate forms and they have them for everything”.

Conversely, for Jill, the integral leadership components were teamwork and being part of the team. As principal and one of the team, she sought to encourage others to participate in decision making, despite being aware that on occasions, she would be responsible for making them alone. As will be discussed later, Jill’s belief in teamwork was tested during the year, but at the beginning of the year, Jill was the only participant to express confidence in her leadership ability.

6.2.1.3 Potential leadership obstacles

Six of the twelve participants envisaged that the workload, long hours, feeling overwhelmed and not having sufficient personal time, could impact on their leadership potential. Furthermore, the unmarried participants saw the likelihood of spending too much time at school due to loneliness and the difficulty of maintaining long distance
friendship networks, as limiting their effectiveness. For example, Nan stated that a single female teaching principal, living alone, worked long hours because there was “no reason to go home.”

Consequently, they expressed concerns about keeping their professional and personal lives separate by, as Nan stated, “trying to be everyone’s friend”, or “blurring the lines of friendship”. Heather noted that she was foremost the principal and teacher, not their friend and that in order to overcome the loneliness she would need to find friends elsewhere. However, Natalie observed that in a small community the beginning teaching principal needed to be aware that too much social distance could damage relationships; but Sally warned that small communities “are shocking for gossip” and it was crucial to ensure that conversations were appropriate at all times. Sally added that in an indigenous community females needed to understand and respect the dress code; for example, it was inappropriate for single white females to be seen walking in the town wearing a swimming costume. She cautioned that this type of transgression could destroy a female teaching principal’s career.

Some participants observed a potential obstacle as the workload leading to “burning out”, which could ultimately impact on their performance. Nina conveyed these feelings by stating:

...I’ll get so overwhelmed by all the other stuff. That’s been one of the main things. Looking at everything and thinking how am I going to do it? I have to remember baby steps and call on other people who are more experienced; and understand they understand this is a learning curve.

On the subject of the workload as an obstacle, Jill asserted that beginning teaching principals needed to, “balance the classroom with the administrivia”. She recommended having an experienced administrative assistant to provide support by diverting unnecessary calls and ensuring the principal read and attended to the most important information.

Other potential obstacles were listed as not seeking assistance early enough, being away from the school too often and trying to accomplish too much too soon. For example, Eve stated that “trying to do it all” was an impediment for some teaching principals, who refused to ask for help because they did not wish to be perceived as incompetent.
Likewise, Alice warned that not seeking help from district office staff was counterproductive and more likely to lead to avoidable errors and hence a label of incompetence. At the same time, Ann saw that being “seduced” into being away from the school too often, could have a negative impact, as she believed the students, not meetings, were her first priority; and Iris acknowledged that trying to make “everything happen” overnight and having “it” all her own way, would reduce her energy levels, leaving her without personal time to re-energise.

6.2.1.4 Perceived training needs

Eight of the twelve participants saw a need for training in administrative tasks, including preparing budgets, completing reports and forms, applying for grants, staffing issues and using the department’s computer programmes.

Those with limited, or no multi-age teaching experience, also sought guidance on whole of school curriculum, behaviour management and organising one classroom for all student year levels. Rather than attend formal training, Alice stated the best training would be to spend a day in a similar sized school with an experienced teaching principal to collect ideas on class organisation. She also suggested it would be helpful if a cluster of small schools met on a regular basis to discuss and resolve similar operational issues.

Others commented on the need for leadership training. For example, Eve sought training in what she termed the “intricacies” of the role, that is, the information senior staff at district office garnered over time and which related to the department’s “big picture issues”. To meet her training needs, Sally planned on attending business meetings, building networks and observing other leadership techniques; whereas Nina had already arranged attendance at a leadership conference early in the school term; and Alice was considering further study in educational leadership.

A different training need was expressed by Nan. Despite some anxiety about the administrative requirements of the role, her primary concern was the introduction of “prep” year with its curriculum focus. She was uncertain how to engage students in a play based curriculum, while at the same time providing academic instruction for all
students up to Year 7. She wanted the department to offer training specifically for one teacher schools.

6.2.1.5 Stakeholders’ responses

The stakeholders agreed that communication was the key to effective leadership. They expected the principal to communicate her vision for the school; her expectations of staff; keep them informed about school matters; and to build rapport with students. Fran had previously worked as an administrative assistant with two male teaching principals, one of whom she did not perceive as a good communicator, as he failed to read e-mails and neglected correspondence in his in-tray. While Kate described a previous teaching principal as having the attitude, “It’s my way or the highway”, but added that they also needed to be assertive enough to say “No” to the P&C (Parents and Citizens Association) when it was appropriate, but not be offensive. Speaking from a school with a high indigenous population, Laura emphasised the value in understanding the differences in communication styles in diverse cultures.

As a P&C member and parent, Mitchell stated that irrespective of gender, how the principal communicated made the difference between success and failure, “Be able to talk and listen. Maintain your position but be open to suggestions”. Gemma agreed and added:

*Being able to communicate with parents and children, that’s really high up there. If you can communicate if you have a problem, go and see about it. If you can sit down, even if you don’t get your own way; sitting down and talking about it is good. I like to go and see them myself. They have to be able to communicate.*

Several stakeholders remarked on the need for the leader to acknowledge the work of staff in the school. For example, Trisha appreciated notes praising her work and being publicly acknowledged in the newsletter; while Linda wanted the principal to let her know not only when she was successful, but what she could do to improve her performance, “I like to know so I can make it better”.

Other school leadership skills valued by the stakeholders included not socialising more with some community members than others and having the ability to speak with
everyone regardless of their position in the community. There was also agreement that a
new school principal should not come into the school and immediately attempt to
change routines and habits, without understanding their history. They believed she
should consult long serving staff members about the school practices before deciding if
change was warranted.

Meanwhile, speaking from one of the district offices, Jason admitted it was not easy for
a teaching principal to maintain acceptable levels of communication with all
stakeholders. He referred to the need to be emotionally mature, so they could hear
negative comments about the school, but not take them personally. At the same time,
Jason asserted that teaching principals needed to communicate their vision for the
school, which in static communities was often a difficult vision to sell. He added:

*I have nothing but admiration for teaching principals...They have to cope
with the three areas – teaching, leading and their own personal lives...They
have to get the balance right.*

6.2 School and teaching

This theme was made up of two factors. The first was knowledge of the school and
community culture and the potential impact it could have on the first year in the school;
and secondly, it addressed the goals each individual set for herself and the school.

6.2.1 Knowledge of school and community culture and its impact

Based on their early observations, coupled with comments from the previous principal,
or district office staff, the teaching principals expressed their initial perceptions of their
new community. Nan reported that the previous principal had warned her about a class
distinction between landowners and land workers.

*Here we have landowners or land workers and there is quite a distinction.
There are a couple of families with quite a bit of money. I find some of them
are quick to judge. They don’t take into consideration other peoples’
children...It’s hard for newcomers to fit in; no one will give them a go.*

Janice’s knowledge of the community’s culture was restricted to an awareness that the
local area was home to an increasing number of retirees, which indicated a declining
number of enrolments at the school; while Iris’s observation was of a pattern of bullying by some of the senior female students. She was unaware of any issues within the community, but discerned a lack of cohesiveness due to an itinerant population who worked seasonally on properties nearby.

I had never worked here at all before taking on the role. I didn’t know the principal before me. I hadn’t heard a lot about the school. When I came here it was a place where a whole lot of people came, but as individuals, there was no sense of community.

Others, such as Eve, were unaware of the culture of the local community, but observed a culture of neglect at the school. Eve noted that maintenance had not been attended to and expressed the opinion that such neglect signified disorganisation and lack of structure for the students and staff:

The mess. There’s an accumulation of crap...That hit me very much that the idea was that this is alright. I came to this house and had to flush the toilet with a stick...The pump is not working and nothing has been done for 10 years...These people have been allowed to create a wallow. This teaches the kids nothing about structure, keeping themselves ordered in their minds and action...There was no sense of structure.

Some participants were aware there were indigenous students in the school and commented on the racial mix, highlighting the percentage of indigenous students; while others, such as Heather, commented on the “White Anglo Saxon” nature of the community and that it appeared to be “close knit”. Neither Nina nor Natalie was aware of any issues within the community. Natalie commented:

I didn’t notice anything in particular...When I arrived it had a very pleasant, peaceful environment here. It’s been very friendly and I’ve been given a warm welcome by everyone I’ve met so far.

Likewise, Sally stated that she was uncertain of the community dynamics, but as she was moving into a predominantly indigenous community, she was aware there were certain aspects of the culture that needed to be handled sensitively. Accordingly, she visited the town and school prior to taking up appointment and met the local residents.

...when we first got to the pub they could tell we were outsiders and they raved about the last teacher for half an hour. I realised I had big shoes to fill. The teacher aide said she would show us the school and the school
house. She showed it as if it was hers. That worried me at first, but then I decided that was wonderful, it showed a vested interest.

Meanwhile, Jill had been informed that a rift existed between the previous principal and the school’s P&C, although her informants had not been clear about the origin of the rift. She assumed it was connected to a special celebration that was being organised for later in the year.

6.2.2.2 Personal and professional goals

Four of the twelve teaching principals listed their goal as wanting to be successful and, “To survive”. For Nina it was to, “Not fall flat on my face”; for Jill it was to be seen as the principal of the school, “In a good way”; while for Natalie, it was about deciding the direction her career would take and whether she would apply for the permanent teaching principal position when it became available during the year.

Student academic improvement was emphasized as a goal by several participants. For instance, Alice was enthusiastic about setting up the curriculum and focusing on student learning; Sally noted that the students’ academic results were below the average range on the state standardized assessments; while Nan, with no experience in teaching the lower grades, assumed an improvement in student academic results, would lead to respect for her as a teacher.

In addition to their goal to, “Simply survive the year”, Janice and Eve later added other goals. For Janice it was:

*To maintain the status quo with programmes already there. Achieve outcomes from programmes we will be doing; maintain kids standard in education and learning...Looking at the start of prep in 2007 and a science focus, middle phase and a strategies action plan and liaise with the local high school and ICT is important. Also relationships with the community are important.*

The additional goal for Eve was:

*I want to be able to walk out of the school at the end of the year and be able to say that everybody has achieved something, no matter how big or small. We all have different potential. But I’d like to be able to look back and say that everyone had the opportunity to achieve and did so. I want to make sure everyone celebrates something.*
Reflecting on the changes she had made in both her personal and professional lives to undertake the role, Ann hoped her choice was the right one. Her goal for the year was:

To have a happy and successful one and feel confident, efficient and to succeed in doing this job. For me it was a bigger decision than it might be for a young person, to pack up my life to move 750km west, and leave my kids behind, so I want to succeed. I want to have an adventure, but want it to be a good adventure. It’s a bigger risk than for a 24 year old.

6.2.2.3 Stakeholders’ responses

The emphasis for stakeholders was on the teaching ability of the teaching principal. They wanted her to focus on students, be consistent, develop rapport, maintain authority, establish routines, teach respect and explain the curriculum to the students in a language they understood. In addition, they needed to have excellent classroom management skills and according to Laura be, “level headed” enough to deal with individuals who were “irrational at times”.

Commensurate with the high administrative expectations, along with lesson planning, teaching each year level and attempting to provide students with individual attention, Peggy concluded that young, beginning teaching principals were, “...thrown in the deep end”. However, despite the workload, Kay expected the teaching principal to be thoroughly dedicated, “The school has to be your life” and she placed the other duties of the teaching principal at a lower level of importance than teaching:

She can spend her time at lunch, or after school, or whenever she can fit it in doing the admin. Some think the kids will fit in, but that’s the first priority.

On an optimistic note, Gemma believed the community and students benefited from beginning teaching principals, who brought new ideas and resources into the school. She found it invigorating and positively challenging and with most new teaching principals being young when they commenced, would not be, “...set in her ways”. However, as a parent, Grace was interested in the teaching principal being experienced in the curriculum for all year levels. She also admitted that she preferred a young male teacher, as she believed they were, “...more naturally sport orientated” and therefore
likely to be physically active with the students. She believed country children were more active than city children and the teacher therefore needed to be willing to play cricket and football and arrange cross country running. For those same reasons she preferred younger teachers to mature teachers, because she believed they were more energetic and willing to play with the students.

Conversely, Donna compared male teaching principals to females and concluded that males, “...pussy footed too much and tried to be buddy, buddy”, whereas females were more likely to make decisions, stick to them and ensured better classroom management.

6.2.3 Administrative duties

Each of the teaching principals commented on the anticipated administrative workload and remarked that as teachers they were not fully aware of, or trained, in the principal’s duties.

Nina indicated that although she was aware that budgets and financial reports existed, had not participated in their preparation. However, she was even more confused by the department’s acronyms and believed that learning them was part of her challenge:

There’s lots of budget stuff and looking up things on Day 8 enrolments and I have to learn acronyms like FTEs. People talked about REDs. I had to look that up. Admin is the huge learning curve but I wanted that experience.

More than half the participants admitted to feeling apprehensive about the financial component of the role. As classroom teachers they had not been exposed to preparing budgets, organizing expenditure, or maintaining financial records. They were also uncertain about learning departmental policies and procedures and systemic reporting, such as SAROP (School Annual Report and Operational Plan) and TSR (Triennial School Review) and computer programmes. Daphne observed that the range and complexity of the financial tasks suggested that the department assumed teaching principals were accountants; whereas Nina commented, that after attending financial training during the vacation period, there were outcomes she had not expected:
As a classroom teacher if you want to go to PD you just ask, but here I have to think about paying for TRS and the course and I found it would cost $1,000 for the three days and the school couldn’t afford it, so I’m only doing one day.

Although Heather was unfamiliar with financial management she believed district office would provide adequate assistance and all she needed was to “stick to budget”, but Daphne expressed a different opinion:

_District office scares the living day lights out of me. They nag us to death. They send emails about something that needs to be done urgently; but when you get the job done it’s like they don’t know what it’s all about._

A different approach was taken by Sally, who confessed that she applied for the role in order to understand the financial system, but believed it would be one of her greatest challenges. Ann echoed Sally’s comments and added that although she was not aware of all the administrative requirements, she was aware that she would be held ultimately responsible for everything that occurred.

One of the administrative concerns for several participants was managing staff. As teachers, they had not organised playground duty rosters or timetables; allocated teacher aide time; resolved disputes between staff; managed unsatisfactory work performances; or set up a system for caring for students who arrived early, or were collected late. They expressed some unease that they were not trained in these essential matters.

As mentioned earlier, several participants reflected on the need for time management and organisational skills in the role. Eve and Ann believed that a de-cluttered work area would assist their organisation and therefore a priority was to throw away accumulated paperwork and resources from the office and classroom; whereas Nina observed that her dilemma was in finding a balance between time spent on administrative tasks and on classroom preparation and teaching; and Iris claimed that organisation was not a natural attribute for her:

_Organisation; I’m not the best at that. I have it in my head, but don’t always carry it through. I can do it, but sometimes it looks a mess._

Others observed that although they had been exposed to organising special events in schools, they had not been responsible for the administrative tasks attached to it. They
were aware that in a small school they were responsible for everything, from planning Anzac Day activities through to the cleaning, gardening, administration and teaching.

Only Alice and Jill made little reference to their unfamiliarity with the administrative tasks of a teaching principal. Alice believed that her already well honed organisational and time management skills would prevent an accumulation of paperwork and stress; whereas Jill, apart from acknowledging an anticipated large number of emails and needing to upgrade her computer skills, did not express any concerns regarding administrative duties.

6.2.3.1 Stakeholders’ responses

The stakeholders acknowledged the volume of administrative tasks, but related it to their own role within the school. Teachers, for example, were more perturbed by the impact the time out of school at meetings, or attending to paperwork had on student learning. In addition, when the teaching principal was out of the school the work backlogged and additional time was required to catch up, but no allowance was made and no extra support provided. Laura observed that in remote areas the teaching principal was required to, “...deal with everything and be first port of call for any issues, including problems with the generator and water”; while Susan claimed that it would help if the teaching principal possessed “an accountancy mind”. Despite all this, Trisha asserted that the teaching principal’s major focus should be on accountability for each child’s academic success, rather than on administration.

Of all the stakeholders, the administrative assistants were particularly aware of the administrative workload of the teaching principal. In Fran’s five years at the school she had worked alongside three teaching principals and stated simply, “They have to be able to do one hundred things at once.” She unfavourably compared the workload to that of principals in larger schools, who did not have the added responsibility of teaching.

The lack of administration experience, or training for teaching principals was also raised by the administrative assistants. Of the seven teaching principals with whom Mary had worked, only one came with experience and understood what was required. Teaching
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principals were expected to use the department’s computer systems and understand the reports they generated, but as few received training, it fell to the administrative assistants to teach them. Despite the added work it gave them, Donna described the teaching principal’s role as “...a thankless job”.

The parent stakeholders admitted they were not aware of all that was administratively involved, but Grace confessed that she was concerned by the amount of time spent out of the classroom dealing with “unnecessary forms”; and Mitchell did not believe district office took into account the amount of travelling required in order to attend meetings or professional development. He concluded by discussing the long hours teaching principals worked and stated, “I don’t think they are remunerated properly.”

The stakeholders agreed that organisation was the key to managing the workload. Kay asserted:

\[
\text{You can’t get through a day with seven classes and admin issues if you are not organised. And if a person does not like to be organised, don’t even think about the job.}
\]

From a teaching perspective, Peggy observed that organisation was essential in order to plan for all year levels, provide individual attention to each student, and organise music, physical education and LOTE (Language Other Than English) when teaching specialists were unable to visit the school:

\[
\text{From an office perspective there isn’t enough insight into what is required by the department...Then there is the leadership issue and that is managing not only staff, but jumping into full leadership role. Suddenly they are doing everything.}
\]

Meanwhile, Brooke and Grace explained that in the more remote areas, school excursions, camps, cultural events, sports days and the ordering of resources, needed to be completed well in advance and if the teaching principal was not organised those events did not occur. Mary agreed and stated that being well organised equated to “everything else flows”. She believed if the teaching principal was trained prior to arriving at the school they would not waste time learning on the job and be better organised.
6.2.4 Gender and age

Only three of the twelve participants considered that being a female would impact on their acceptance as a leader. Daphne and Natalie believed that a stereotypic image of males as natural leaders and being more active and better disciplinarians existed in country areas; while Heather was aware that a town meeting had been held prior to her appointment to request that a male, who had acted as principal for several months, be permanently appointed to the school. When Heather was appointed district office personnel had been forced to intervene to explain the recruitment and selection process to the community. Nevertheless, Heather was aware a degree of scepticism and misgiving still remained.

Of the remaining participants, four were certain that since previous principals had been female their gender would not be relevant; while five participants were unsure what community reaction to expect. For example, Alice expressed the opinion that males were more likely to be accepted if they were, “blokey blokes”, but added that, “females are just expected to be females”. She elaborated:

_If they are blokey blokes they are accepted, but if not they are outcast. Arty type men in the country are not accepted as readily as blokey blokes. It’s more about personality for males... It’s different for males; they can put all their effort into the job because they have a wife who takes care of everything else. For females it’s a grey area when they want to have children._

Although neither Janice nor Jill expected their gender to be significant to the community, they both commented that historically small communities favoured a male in leadership roles. Jill observed:

_I get the impression that it doesn’t matter how they are, it’s the fact they are males, they are accepted anyway because they are male. If he is male and walking in he is a principal, while females have to earn stripes and in some communities really have to earn them...Women have to be more careful what they do than men._

However, according to Nan, gender was not as important as “upbringing”, which she defined as talking with community members about topics other than school:
If you are not brought up to talk to parents about things other than school you probably won’t fit in. One of the fathers went to school here and has sent four kids through the school and he said I was the only teacher he could have a conversation with because I talk cattle prices and wheat. I don’t talk school in social contexts.

Some participants acknowledged that a gender balance was relevant for students and because the schools were largely staffed by females, the students, especially boys, might benefit from a male presence. Daphne remarked that in a school with an all female staff, students did not have the opportunity to benefit from the different approach of a male teacher. She planned on seeking out male supply teachers to bring gender balance into the school.

Seven of the twelve participants observed that their age, rather than gender, could influence their acceptance into a leadership role in the community. Four of the seven were in the 20–30 year age group and were aware they would be the youngest member on staff and could be viewed as too young for the role’s responsibilities. However, like Alice, Nan, believed personality played as much a part in acceptance as either age or gender:

The previous principal was a female and older and was not accepted, but it had nothing to do with gender, more how she worked, or her personality.

Others perceived that their age could work to their advantage. For instance, the previous female principal at Nan’s school had been an older female and less inclined to participate in physical activities. Therefore, Nan assumed that her willingness to be involved in sport could garner acceptance from parents. At the other end of the age continuum, Iris and Jill, in the 51–60 year age group and Ann in the 41-50 year age group also presumed their ages would work for them. Iris was aware that the young male school groundsperson had not responded well to a female principal at another school, but Iris assumed that her age would make her less threatening; and Jill was confident she could deal with most eventualities and that the community would see she was an experienced teacher and came with life experiences. Similarly, Ann remarked:

I’m hoping that my age will count for something. The staff are about the same age group too, so they should be less resentful than if I was a younger person coming in and telling them what to do.
6.2.4.1 Stakeholders’ responses

The stakeholders expressed a mixed response to the impact of gender and age on the community. Nine of the stakeholders did not believe gender would play a significant role in acceptance, but perceived age and personality as more relevant factors.

Cathy acknowledged that some years earlier gender had been perceived as important, because parents wanted a male, “...so they could play ball in the afternoons”, but she believed the previous female teaching principal had broken through the gender barrier. Instead, Cathy believed age was more important, as younger principals found it difficult to relate to older people and with insufficient classroom experience did not have credibility with parents. Peggy and Kay added that individuals unfamiliar with country living, not sports inclined, or not willing to become part of the community, would experience difficulty settling into the community. Likewise, Gemma referred to the age of the teaching principal as a more significant factor than gender. When the community was advised a new teaching principal had been appointed, her age, rather than her gender, had been singled out for comment.

On the other hand, after working with six male and three female teaching principals at the school over a twenty year time period, Lois claimed the only difference she noted was that males tended to tell people what they wanted to hear in an effort to keep them happy. Although some females also did this, for the most part she believed, “...females know they have to stick to their guns”. Similarly, after ten years working at the school and a family history connected to the community, Trisha was unable to articulate why the community preferred a male. From her experiences, she was not aware of any gender leadership differences, “...leaders are leaders”.

Paradoxically, Kate and Linda conceded that regardless of the community not differentiating between the genders of the teaching principal, they personally, preferred a male in the role. Kate believed that males, “...show some superior leadership”, but did not believe a male would remain at the school more than six months due to the female teachers “eccentric” behaviour; and Linda believed the community had too much input into the school and believed a male would not tolerate their intrusion, “When there’s a male principal in town they seem to have more authority.”
There was some disagreement about the role of males and sport in communities. Grace found it, “...very disappointing” that they had so few male teachers, as she believed males were more sports orientated than females and country students wanted to play sport. Whereas Donna observed that a previous male teaching principal had been too involved in sport, forcing students to play even if they had no interest. Due to her belief that students needed to play sport, Grace preferred younger teachers to older ones, as she believed they were more active. At the same time, she expected them to have considerable teaching experience.

There was agreement however, that having a partner would make the teaching principal more acceptable. Fran observed that she previously worked with two male teaching principals and believed the first one, who was married with young children, was more readily accepted than the second, who was younger and unmarried.

6.2.5 Community and rural living

This theme addressed the participants’ expectations of living in small rural and remote locations and their plans to integrate into the community. The first part of this section deals with the participant’s previous rural and remote experiences, while the second part focuses on dealing with the isolation of rural and remote living and the actions they intended implementing in order to assimilate into the community.

6.2.5.1 Previous small community experiences

One third of the participants admitted to no prior experience working in a small school community. Alice and Nina previously lived and taught in regional centres in Queensland, as well as in city schools in the United Kingdom; Heather’s experiences were restricted to regional and coastal areas; and Daphne had taught in a small town, but not in an area classified as rural or remote. Daphne and Nina were to be teaching principals in schools classified as rural, while Alice and Heather were to be in areas classified as remote.

Consequently, they were unsure how they would “fit in”; although Alice believed she had an advantage as her partner was known independently of her in the local
community. Meanwhile, Heather admitted she experienced a culture shock when she first visited the school. She was accustomed to spending time at the beach at weekends or going to coffee shops with friends, but the beach was now several hours drive away and there were no coffee shops in town. She had not given much thought to how she would adjust to living in a small community.

Nina also commented on the culture shock she experienced when she visited the school for the first time. A kangaroo bounded past her while she stood in the front garden and later, inside the house, a mouse scurried past. She added:

**But I can’t stand the thought of setting a mousetrap, so we will just have to learn to get on together.**

The only participants to claim a rural background were Nan and Natalie. Nan grew up on a property and worked in rural areas, while Natalie had been born and raised in a small town and preferred country living. Neither presented particular plan for making themselves accepted, believing they would simply join in and become part of the local environment.

6.2.5.2 Impact of isolation and gaining acceptance into the community

Some participants, such as Daphne, were not deterred by the prospect of isolation, “I feel this is a retreat”. She compared it to a large regional centre in south-east Queensland and indicated that she planned to join a local social club.

Likewise, both Jill and Janice previously taught in smaller communities and were conscious of the need to establish themselves in the community. Jill planned on becoming involved in local town committees and her husband was already a member of a local service club; while Janice commented that the nearest business centre was less than thirty minutes away, whereas at her previous school a two hour drive was involved. She planned on demonstrating her support to the community by shopping locally and joining committees. Both Janice and Jill expressed an interest in working as volunteers in the community and encouraging community members to use the school for local functions.
Despite her earlier experiences in rural and remote areas, Nan expressed apprehension about being in an area where the school was the only building. She observed that this was a different proposition to her previous role as governess when there were always other people on the property, but in this case the school was isolated with no other living arrangements, “It’s 80 kilometres from town and has bad roads. I’ve never lived alone in this situation before.” Similarly, Nina claimed that the nearest sporting club was an hour’s drive away and she did not anticipate wanting to drive that distance after teaching and attending to administrative duties all day. She was uncertain how she would build relationships within the community.

On the other hand, Sally, with previous small school teaching experience, declared that one of the benefits of rural living was being able to drive to work and not be hindered by traffic lights. Likewise, she enjoyed walking into the local hotel and knowing everyone and she believed the environment encouraged a supportive community and a family atmosphere. Sally planned on attending community functions and eventually commencing a sporting club.

A note of caution came from Eve, who was moving into an area with no township. Although she planned on encouraging the community to use the school for recreational activities, she warned there was little privacy in rural and remote communities and believed they wanted ownership of the principal as well as the school:

> They think nothing of saying to you “Where were you at the weekend?” I don’t ask them, but they think they have the right to ask me.

6.2.5.3 Stakeholders’ responses

The stakeholders agreed that acceptance into any community relied on preparedness to be involved in community activities, not just student and school related activities. Others recommended opening the school to the community by holding barbecues and sports nights.

Grace perceived that socialising with the community was a necessity for acceptance and observed it was impossible to separate from the community in such an isolated area,
“It’s not just the school, but their social life; they depend on the community for that.” Likewise, Kate encouraged the teaching principal to be seen socially in town, although not with the same group of community members, as that would be viewed as “playing favourites”; while Linda cautioned against divulging too much personal data which could lead to a negative image and be difficult to later alter. A similar observation was made by Mitchell, who recommended not being too trusting or sharing information that should remain confidential.

The need to build relationships within the community was also emphasised by Mary, who worried that if parents were not happy with the teaching principal, they could withdraw the students, which would result in the school closing and non-teaching staff not having employment. Jason supported Mary’s comments and advocated that the teaching principal build relationships through trust and respect by working with the parents for the benefit of the students:

> They maintain those relational relationships at the same time as keeping their sanity and being people outside the school. I see it from teaching principals more than non teaching principals in big schools who can hide in the community. There is no hiding when you are a teaching principal.

Despite the need for caution in developing friendships, Peggy acknowledged the loneliness of life for a young, single female in a remote area without an established network of friends. She recommended connecting with another teaching principal close by, so they could provide a social outlet for each other. Kay added that the isolation could lead to excessive alcohol drinking or partying, which reduced community respect for females. Peggy concluded by asserting it was preferable to appoint teaching principals who had been raised in rural or remote areas as they were more familiar with the attitudes and the unique circumstances those communities presented.

Meanwhile, Laura’s observations about living in a rural and remote area were based on working in an indigenous community, where social conventions differed to those in a non-indigenous society. Community acceptance relied on building rapport firstly with the women and not being alone with a male. Secondly, as employment in indigenous communities was limited, the teaching principal should take every opportunity to provide work at the school and teach skills for future employment.
6.2.6 Expectations

This theme related to the beginning teaching principals understanding of the school community’s expectations of them, as well as the expectations they had of themselves.

6.2.6.1 Community expectations

Six participants believed that the primary expectation of the community involved student outcomes. For instance, Sally and Heather believed the community expected them to improve the students’ academic performances; ensure the students enjoyed school; and provide stability. Heather planned on remaining in the community at weekends to demonstrate her willingness to be immersed in the community and provide the stability they sought. Likewise, Daphne and Iris assumed that the community expected them to make school a happy and productive place, to maintain family values; manage negative student behaviour; and ensure the students’ academic results were at a similar, or higher standard than the remainder of the state.

Based on her limited contact with parents, Nan was anxious that their expectations would be unrealistic and she expected to “have a battle” when attempting to introduce HRE into the curriculum:

In some places they would say if kids are learning or happy to come to school, OK, whereas they have a lot of other expectations...They want their kids to learn but they also want me to shelter their kids and not know about the real world. Some of them don’t like mixing with other schools...They don’t want their kids to be influenced by others...They want you to be a mind reader. They expect their kids to be sheltered.

Three of the participants assumed the community expected them to be leaders. In Daphne’s opinion they would, “look up to me for that” and by demonstrating leadership she would show she was, “not just there for the daily grind”. Jill was even more outspoken when she referred to staff expectations around her leadership:

Others will expect me to have a backbone and stand and lead. They want the principal to lead, not kowtow to the P&C.

In addition to expecting her to be a leader, Nina was concerned about the level of input the community might want into the school and its operation. Furthermore, she
anticipated that staff expected her to show them respect as well as to be firm with the community and to, “Know what I’m doing”. Consequently, the expectation she held for herself was, “To present a confident front and do well with my teaching.”

Eve believed the community expected to be kept informed about the school’s operations and she was in no doubt she could meet that expectation. In addition, she planned on negotiating her role with the P&C and rather than telling them what she would do, “I will explain rather than expect.” Conversely, Ann was concerned that the community would expect her to emulate the previous principal and be, “A party animal”.

6.2.6.2 Expectations of self

Daphne’s expectation was that stakeholders would speak with her if an issue arose, “I don’t like car park gossip. I want to foster a place where they feel they can talk to me.” She was also aware that a rumour was circulating about whether the previous principal would return during the year. She wanted to distance herself from the rumours and prove that the students would continue to learn, regardless of the principal’s future.

She is still substantive so they can’t advertise it until she officially moves on. I would consider applying, but there is always the possibility of someone else wanting here, who has been further west and wants to come here. The P&C would like me to stay – they would object to another person coming in because they want stability.

Similar expectations about communicating with the community and not being involved in petty disputes were mentioned by other participants. They wanted to be seen as impartial and non-judgemental and presenting as a person the community could trust. Iris added that with “prep” year being introduced to schools, she wanted to show parents and teachers a positive outlook and convince them she could manage the changes to the school.

The expectations Ann held differed from those of other participants. She was concerned about the accommodation provided to the second teacher, as the house was without air conditioning or fans, in an area notorious for its summer weather conditions. Ann was aware conflict could develop with the owner of the house, a local community member and that as principal she could be expected to resolve the matter. She was unsure how
she should approach the situation and whether her conflict resolution skills were adequate for the task.

6.2.6.3 Stakeholders’ responses

Throughout the interviews the stakeholders noted their expectations of the teaching principal, from teaching students, to attending community social functions, to providing leadership and communicating with all stakeholders. Their comments were best summed up by Lois who recommended being honest with the community, especially when finances were involved. In some schools the community had considerable input into the school’s operation and the P&C was diligent in its scrutiny of processes. By not keeping them informed, the teaching principal could lose their trust and respect. Lois concluded:

> We go through principals, despite good kids and staff. The community has high expectations. If they feel they are being lied to, or not being open, particularly about money, if they don’t know where it is, they get very defensive.

6.2.7 Personal factors

This theme resulted from participants’ comments regarding how they personally balanced their work and personal lives while living in a small community and the impact their reactions could have on the overall leadership experience.

The participants listed specific stressors, such as building relationships with stakeholders and the dual responsibilities of teaching and administrative duties, as impacting on their ability to successfully perform as teaching principals. Heather stated that essentially the source of stress for her was: “Not knowing if I’m doing the right thing”.

Teaching multi age classes without prior experience was stressful for some participants, while the prospect of dealing with angry parents was stressful for others. Whereas Eve recognised that one of the primary stressors for her was, “The ghost of the previous principal”. She attributed a range of negative school characteristics, including poor communication and limited staff participation, to the former principal’s leadership.
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Other stressors with the potential to impact on success were isolation, homesickness and being away from family and support networks. The usual strategies to overcome stress, such as shopping, meeting friends in coffee shops, or attending the cinema, were not available in most of the twelve school communities. Sally added, “I eat when I’m stressed, but here I can’t just go to McDonalds”.

Neither Iris nor Jill expected to experience high levels of stress during the year, although Iris acknowledged, “The biggest thing is the unknown – which job had to be done yesterday”. Likewise, Jill reflected on her past experiences in small school communities and envisaged a relatively stress free year.

Each participant identified her own personal strategies to alleviate stress, such as jogging, fishing, playing sport, walking and craft activities. Most of all, they intended turning to their support networks of friends and family. The married participants rated their husbands and adult children as their primary support, while those who were unmarried catalogued parents, siblings, friends and other teaching principals. They acknowledged the need to manage their stress and to establish lives away from the school, but at the same time they wanted to be successful in order to achieve their career goals.

Sally and Ann planned on remaining at the school for two years, but were unsure of the future past that time; while Iris stated she was looking no further than the immediate future with an ambition, “to be successful” and “remain sane”. The career goals of Natalie and Nina, who were acting principals for at least the first six months of the year, were on hold while they decided if they would apply for the role when it became available. Nina added that her long term ambition was not to be a principal, but rather to work in curriculum development. Conversely, Jill stipulated she would remain at the school for the mandatory three years, but was keen to move on to be principal at a Band 7 or Band 8 school in the same geographic area as her current school.

Meanwhile, Heather and Nan were already questioning if being a school principal was their goal. Unlike Jill, Heather was not intent on moving up in band levels, but preferring instead to, “…relocate to a Band 6 where it’s more civilized. My preference is for deputy principal at a big school.” Nan also hinted at the possibility of
relinquishing the position and returning to the classroom, preferably as a teacher in a
two or three teacher school. She was philosophically opposed to the concept of “prep”
year and reluctant to engage in it in a small school.

Eve was the only participant to have a long term view of her future career. Her ambition
e encompassed a number of possibilities:

I plan on being at the school for two to three years. I would like to move
somewhere where I can drink the tap water and possibly move up the
ladder. I think my ideal job now is to be a troubleshooter. To go into a
school in serious shit and work with kids, community, staff, and work
through the process, put things into place, work with the new person coming
in. I like things to be always changing, always challenging. I like to learn so
much, so quickly, and throw myself into the deep end, where I always have
to come up with new applications, new approaches, at a new point in time.
I’m people based. My ultimate goal is to be Director General of course.

6.2.7.1 Stakeholders’ responses

The personal characteristics of teaching principals were consistently mentioned by
stakeholders throughout the interviews.

As already mentioned, one of the major characteristics they expected was
communication skills to deal with all situations and all individuals. In fact, Grace
assumed that teachers were specifically trained in communication and would excel in it,
although she conceded that life experiences also impacted on performance. At the same
time, Lois and Kay believed one of the attributes of a successful leader was the ability
to listen and consider others’ opinions but to have the strength to make a decision and
stand by it. Some staff, such as Donna, perceived that the teaching principal needed to
be assertive, not only to stand by unpopular decisions, but to ensure the P&C did not try
to control the school.

Meanwhile, Susan and Cathy identified personal traits of honesty, self confidence,
being a “people person” and being able to manage high levels of stress as personal
qualities of a successful teaching principal; and Jason believed the teaching principal
needed to be emotionally mature in order to listen to negative comments, but not take them personally.

6.3 End of year interviews

At the end of their first year as a teaching principal eleven of the original twelve teaching principals and eight of the seventeen stakeholders agreed to participate in a second interview. The stakeholders represented seven of the twelve schools initially involved in this study and consisted of three teachers, three administration officers, a teacher aide and a parent. For ease of identification, the remaining stakeholders are shown in Table 6.3, along with the teaching principal involved in this study.

Table 6.3 Participating Stakeholders in second interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Years associated with school and/or community</th>
<th>Teaching Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lois</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Heather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Nan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Administration Officer</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Alice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna</td>
<td>Administration Officer</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Janice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>Administration Officer</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Iris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gemma</td>
<td>Teacher Aide and Parent</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Natalie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell</td>
<td>Parent and P&amp;C</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The names of all stakeholder participants are pseudonyms*
6.3.1 Leadership

6.3.1.1 Skills required for effective school leadership

Five of the eleven teaching principals responded that during the year they changed their assumptions about leadership. They were more aware that the leader required high levels of confidence and assertiveness and Janice acknowledged that modeling behaviour was not always successful. She discovered she needed to be more decisive, assertive and “…put my foot down and say ‘I am the principal’,” in order to accomplish goals for the school. Whereas Heather observed:

I didn’t think it took as much self confidence, but it does. I wouldn’t have thought it, but that makes me question if I’m cut out to do it. Maybe I’m second in command type.

Meanwhile, the major change in understanding for Nan related to accepting that she did not need to, “reinvent the wheel” and that team work was essential, “…just because you are the principal of a school does not mean you are the be all and end all.” Likewise, Ann reviewed the comments she made at the beginning of the year, when she believed the leader needed to be in control and observed, “I used to think principals were the end of line, but they are not.”

Other participants continued to assert that strong leadership was essential in small communities. For instance, contrary to her belief at the beginning of the year that familiarity with Education Queensland’s documents and the school’s resources were the primary skills required, Natalie found instead:

These places, the reality is it can make or break a person, and I would hate it to break me and the drive for what I love doing. It makes me more aware of what I do and how I go about it. If there is an issue I need to deal with it and not just do what everyone else wants me to do. I do what I believe is best for the school.

Meanwhile, Sally’s proposal at the beginning of the year that she would remain positive, had changed to an acceptance that the leader would “cop it” regardless of what they did. She asserted therefore, that the leader needed to be resilient and not allow others to impact on her emotional state of mind. The primary lesson for Sally was:
Communication and decision making continued to be seen as essential leadership skills, but emphasis was also placed on being resilient and self confident. Heather observed that the School Opinion Survey was a useful tool in assessing stakeholders’ opinions and highlighted for her that staff did not perceive her communication style as effective. She therefore planned on reassessing how she communicated. Likewise, at the end of the year they reported they were more aware of their decision making responsibilities and the degree of confidence required, especially when unpopular decisions were involved. To this effect, Sally cautioned that teaching principals did not commence with high levels of confidence, “...even if they appear confident, it is false confidence”. Alternatively, Iris perceived confidence as a double edged sword. She applauded it, but cautioned against being “…gung ho and over confident.” While Janice referred to, “biting the bullet” and being, “tough in the face of crisis”; Alice observed the leader should not “crumble under pressure” over an unpopular decision; and Nan summarized decision making by stating:

...be firm in the decision and stand by the decision. You can’t please everyone. You really need to take in everyone’s point of view but then make the decision, stand by it and justify it. Support the others who don’t agree with it or be willing to discuss the issues...Don’t say this is working so we don’t change it.

Accordingly, building relationships with stakeholders was listed as another skill fundamental to leadership. Iris provided an example of teacher aides who had been given little direction by the previous principal, but by building relationships, Iris managed to guide them, while allowing them to maintain their independence. Similarly, Ann realised the value in understanding diverse personalities, while giving staff a sense of empowerment:

Some need it [praise] more than others. I didn’t realize how needy some people are...I don’t seek it, so I don’t give it normally, but I worked it out that the groundsperson does need it, so I try to do it without any prompting...The second teacher was like that too and I know now I didn’t pay her enough attention and let her know she was valued. She told me at one time she didn’t feel valued at her other school. That was the clue, but I didn’t get it.
The prediction, at the beginning of the year, about the workload associated with the dual roles was confirmed at its end. Heather compared the workload of more than twelve hour days and just one administration day off class each week, to her previous non-teaching deputy principal role, “…to do more than I ever did as a DP.” However, the systemic reports, which were viewed with caution at the beginning of the year, were less of a concern at its end. Heather commented, “AOP - that’s just flowery words that people expect you to put on paper”.

To accomplish the many tasks, organisation and time management were deemed as requisites. Ann argued that lack of organisation would lead to not meeting deadlines, but added: “…no matter how many times District Office rings me, the classroom is my priority. It’s easy to be distracted by admin.” While Natalie confessed:

> Time management is one of the biggest things; one of the areas I want to work on this year to manage it more appropriately...For me, it’s making sure I’m giving students everything I can and doing office work to the best of my ability. I can’t do anything half heartedly. So time management is always going to be a concern or issue. It’s a personal thing for me.

Sally made similar observations about the workload and the duality of the role, but attempted to keep it in perspective:

> Admin is what you have to do to get the job done, to keep the school functioning. It’s not really the job...I found it difficult to wear all the hats but I learned more about teaching by doing the admin side. I didn’t link them as much as being the same job but they really are...With admin stuff I got done what could get done, but tried to put teaching at number one. The admin had to be done, so I could leave [the second teacher] with the class and go do the admin...We did a lot of the admin together.

Sally also remarked on the commitment it took to live in remote areas and to build relationships with stakeholders, while at the same time participating in the various roles the teaching principal played:

> ...boss, behaviour management expert, teacher; within the community the social worker; and the district has certain criteria for you to do on a weekly, daily, monthly basis. In some ways you have to wear so many hats. It was more demanding than I thought it would be. Demanding on a personal note as well, not just professional, I had to give so much of myself.
Other participants commented on the limited support from District Office through e-mails not being answered; short time frames given for tasks to be completed; lack of direction about staff management; and inadequate budget to meet the cost of maintenance. In more remote areas without easy access to maintenance services, the teaching principal completed many of those tasks. Janice stated that she worked from 5 am until 7 pm and, “...I came away absolutely knackered”. While Heather found that as well as being a furniture removalist when asbestos was discovered in the school:

...if there was something wrong in the grounds and gardens I was supposed to know how to fix it. Plumbing, electrical work. It was I who was expected to have both hats on at once.

Likewise, Eve claimed teaching principals were expected to do too much and, “...to manage the unmanageable”, with little or no training and with little or no support, “We have to do it and there seems to be more pressure on young females to do it because they are young females.”

As a result, the participants agreed that being an experienced teacher with a range of resources and behaviour management strategies was essential. They believed it would be too difficult for a relatively new teacher to manage the complex and demanding task of planning and preparing lessons for multi age grades, as well as complete the exhausting administrative duties. Natalie asserted:

To pull oneself from all different contexts. To move oneself around so much. Jump from working in the classroom to making phone calls and understanding the principalship and talking to a parent who comes to school two days after an incident and then draw on that information.

Overall however, the teaching principals agreed that their leadership skills improved during the year. Iris believed that at the beginning of the year her skills, “were rusty”, but had developed; while Alice noted that she discovered “gaps” in her knowledge; and Nina stated:

I had improved remarkably by the end. The biggest thing was wondering if I was doing the right thing, the right way. But because I had never been involved in admin at a high level before, I had nothing to compare it to.
While Jill observed that the year taught her the necessity of setting up boundaries and demonstrating how she expected staff to perform:

> I don’t think I did that strongly enough... Don’t assume people are going to be ethical and professional with you. Be really careful about everything you say... It has been a big learning curve for my partner, they don’t interact with him the same way [as the previous community]... I am certainly very careful what I say... We have to be careful, and can’t always be honest.

However, despite cataloguing a list of effective leadership skills, Natalie and Ann stated that they still found it difficult to think of themselves as leaders and were uncertain if they understood the criteria for effective leadership. Ann stated:

> I’m not sure what a leader is and what is required of them. In terms of being a community leader, no, that’s not happening. At school, yes with staff and students... but there is an expectation that the principal is leader in the community too... This community is just a little bit too small for me.

### 6.3.1.2 Personal leadership style

Seven of the eleven participants indicated that their leadership style had changed during the year. For instance, Sally discovered that being, “easy going” was not effective and that sometimes she had to, “put my foot down.” She also learned not to rush into making changes and to consult the community. When she and the second teacher arrived at the school they decided to conduct a thorough clean out and throw away an accumulation of what she described as rubbish, but later discovered it included student work, which angered and offended the community. Sally stated:

> I learned not to go at things like a bull at a gate. I started it without thinking how that would affect anyone else. I did not think about the backlash. It was a good lesson... We thought this was our school, let’s fix it the way we want it. We realise now it’s not our school, we’re only here for 2 years. So it was good to happen right at the beginning of the year. It changed my mind set a little bit.

Alice also rethought her leadership style. At the beginning of the year she described her leadership in terms of classroom management, but at its end admitted that leadership was more than just being a teacher. She reported that some of her early dealings with the P&C were errors of judgement, plus she found it difficult to, “have the hard conversations” as a leader, with parents of students, when those parents were her
friends outside the school environment. Alice also linked the students’ results on the standardised tests and the responses on the School Opinion Survey, to her perception of successful leadership. Natalie also reported that she did not necessarily change her leadership style, but became more aware of its responsibilities after successfully applying for the substantive principal’s role. Similarly, Heather reported that while her leadership style did not change, she became more aware of the impact of her style on stakeholders and the difficulty in maintaining relationships with parents:

...it’s made me question whether I’m cut out to deal with the parents’ rough side. I don’t have the confidence. You deal with all sorts of situations when kids do the wrong thing, and the admin side. Love that. Love the whole school planning, but when it came to parents, when they attacked me personally, I just crumbled...That’s the one area where I need help. I couldn’t take one more person attacking me.

The outcome was not as positive for Nan, who reported negative changes in her leadership style as she became less satisfied with the community and school. In hindsight, she believed her primary mistake was not being assertive and saying, “No” more often, but she also acknowledged that in the last six months she was not in the right frame of mind to exercise her leadership skills, “I didn’t care. I was so over the small mindedness of the people”. Similarly, Eve’s leadership style changed. At the beginning of the year she voiced concern about, “the ghost of the previous principal” and during the year this concern came to fruition. Staff would not participate in school discussions due to earlier negative responses from the previous principal and Eve was disappointed that she (metaphorically), “Had to hit them across the head with a baseball bat and say you are not doing the job.” She also protested that the community did not permit her to demonstrate leadership skills, “I didn’t fit the community...I’m not the person to move it forward. They wouldn’t let me.” She rated her major mistake as, “going there in the first place” and was unable to name any successes apart from, “I’m able to sit here and talk now. I survived.” In retrospect, she believed her leadership suffered from her own expectations, “I don’t care about them beating me. It’s my expectations. Expectations I have of myself. I couldn’t let me beat me.”

Jill also reported a negative change in her leadership style following “upward bullying” from staff. At the beginning of the year she described her leadership style as encouraging teamwork, but at its end was frustrated because, “They didn’t let me use
my own leadership style”. In comments reflecting those of Nan, Jill claimed she had not been assertive enough at the beginning of the year. She was unable to highlight any one particularly stressful event, finding the entire year stressful and demoralising.

6.3.1.3 Potential leadership obstacles

For this section the teaching principals were asked to reflect on the past year and identify the obstacles that impacted on their year.

Seven of the participants responded that the major obstacle was meeting the demands of the administrative workload, which took precedence over teaching. Nina expressed the conflict between the two roles by saying:

Ideally, teaching is most important. At times I felt I didn’t give everything to that, but I couldn’t. There were weeks when I was out of class for three days a week at business meetings. That’s not necessarily the best way to run the programme. I had to give attention to admin stuff or behaviour management.

Those who anticipated the administrative duties would be time consuming reported their expectations were justified. Asked where she spent most of her time, Alice responded:

Admin work. If I was on top of that I could work in the classroom more. When admin was up to date and I had 5 minutes to spare I could fill in a form or whatever was needed. If my office was a mess and I had jobs to do, it would have been much harder.

Eve also reported that she spent more time completing administrative paperwork than teaching and found this presented another obstacle to her leadership abilities:

Admin took precedence over teaching. I was out of the classroom most of the time dealing with the bullshit...The paperwork is the same as for a Band 8 principal who has a deputy and is not on class. We are expected to succeed with no tools. We try to be on top of things and we turn around the next day and there is more.

Looking at the obstacles from a different perspective, Janice claimed that instead of setting up the classroom and planning for teaching, one of the obstacles was, “...trying to do everything for everyone at once and trying to be everything”. Iris agreed that “trying to please everyone all the time” was counter-productive, but also suggested
that it was difficult to remain “dispassionate”. For example, when a new student found it difficult to adjust to being in a multi age class, Iris proposed strategies to engage the child, but recommended to the parents that if, by the end of the year, the student’s behaviour had not improved, they should seek enrolment at a larger school. When the parents telephoned the next day with their decision, Iris felt it was a personal attack on her:

Next day they rang to say they would take the child to another school and I took it personally. I was not prepared for how I felt about it. I had thought how everyone else would feel, but not how I would feel. It was no great issue. I was a bit affronted and a bit teary for a while.

Meanwhile, Sally believed the first six months were the most difficult and that the obstacles were difficult to pre-guess. She recommended that for the first month, “try not to get the hole too deep so you can’t crawl out of it”. Sally’s second obstacle was to do with control:

...some can go too far, it goes to their head. They try to control the whole community. Suddenly they go from teacher, where they were told what to do, to making decisions that affect the whole community...There’s only so much PD you can get and so much that sinks in until you are doing the job...Don’t give up too soon.

Issues relating to the school community were frequently raised as obstacles. For instance, Jill claimed not knowing who the power brokers were in the school and community was a major obstacle; while the unmarried participants discussed the isolation of not having a friendship network. Ann added that the isolation obstacle was reduced by having a partner at home to, “have a grizzle with”.

The obstacle Nan identified was not knowing, “where to find things; who the contact people are; when lunch hours are, etc”; whereas Eve suggested that expecting to immediately succeed in everything was an obstacle and that the new teaching principal should learn to forgive herself for not being able to do it all; and Natalie observed that not having, “a picture of where you want to go, or how to deal with people”, was an obstacle to leadership. She emphasized the need for a collegial support system and forewarned the need for a new teaching principal to “Take one day at a time and work your way through it.”
6.3.1.4 Perceived training needs

Despite most of the participants requesting training in the administrative tasks at the beginning of the year, at its end the emphasis was on leadership.

The advantages of having a mentor, or being supported through a work shadowing programme, were suggested. They believed an experienced small school principal should be appointed to mentor beginning teaching principals through their first year in the role and Alice commented on the knowledge she acquired through a work shadowing programme she requested. Overall, the teaching principals did not value a programme based on theoretical constructs, but sought training in activities relevant to their small schools.

Others requested time management, organisation and communication training with an emphasis on small school leadership. Janice highlighted the need to manage time efficiently in a small school when the education department arranged meetings, or wanted administrative paperwork during the term when report cards were being written, staff were absent due to illness, new non-teaching staff were being trained, when she was filling the role of workplace health and safety office and information technology officer, teaching a multi age class, or was embroiled in student discipline issues.

Meanwhile, without being specific about the type of training she personally required, Eve was vocal about the lack of training available for female beginning teaching principals, “We need a hell of a lot more up skilling”. However, with that in mind, she argued that attending training during the school day was a contentious issue with the need to find a replacement and explain her absence to parents:

We are dumped in it. I think we are bait...If we are lucky we get some induction and perhaps some PD but we are crucified for taking that, for being out of the school...We tend to feel a failure...Principals in small schools probably need someone on the ground to say it's OK to fail so long as you learn from it. It's an isolating job.
6.3.1.5 Stakeholders’ responses

The stakeholders assessed the teaching principals’ leadership skills by how well they communicated. Stakeholders in Heather, Natalie, Iris and Janice’s schools rated them as successful because they kept students, staff and the community informed and listened to what they had to say. Furthermore, Lois reported that Heather demonstrated her leadership skills through making difficult decisions and following through with them, despite being, “…pushed outside her comfort zone on several occasions”. Kay and Gemma were equally positive about Natalie’s communication skills. Kay admired Natalie because, “…if she does not agree, she will say so and I appreciate that.” While Gemma considered, “She is probably one of the better principals we have had as far as communicating with the community and running the office.” Accordingly, the students responded well to Natalie, the community respected her because she participated in their functions and the staff enjoyed her organising social activities for them. Similarly, Mitchell noted that while he was P&C president, a particularly sensitive matter occurred and Nina managed it successfully through tactful and sensitive communication.

Conversely, Peggy believed that Nan’s communication was clouded by taking parents’ comments personally, making her unresponsive, “…when she got stressed, she got grumpy with you.” Furthermore, Nan’s relationship with staff was dictated by her being, “quite moody” and they could not form relationships with her. Likewise, Mary believed Alice’s greatest weakness was her inability to communicate and her tendency to be, “a control freak”. Alice’s lack of social communication with staff jeopardised her relationships with them and led to low morale and dissatisfaction.

6.3.2 School and Teaching

This section sought to determine if the knowledge the teaching principals held of the school and community culture at the beginning of the year, was maintained during the year and whether their experiences in setting up priorities and goals for the year continued to be relevant at year’s end.
6.3.2.1 Knowledge of school and community culture and its impact

At the end of the year each participant was able to provide a thumbnail sketch of the community and school culture. Five provided positive pictures of the community and its culture, while six were less flattering.

One of the positive stories came from Iris, who reported that following the departure of certain families and the arrival of new ones, the sense of community improved:

50% of the school left. We lost 8 to Year 8; we have four families who moved elsewhere and taken their children to closer schools...There was an end of an era for a whole group...A few families are still with us from the era just closing and they value some things like traditions of the school and a couple of those families have been involved for two or three generations and they value these things. The culture I saw at the beginning of the year changed a lot. There were no longer individuals; there was more a sense of community.

Sally also related a story of cultural change. During the year she strove to show the community that the school served an educational purpose, not a babysitting service and by the end of the year was able to report a positive outcome:

We created a good learning environment for kids to understand they were coming to school to be educated so they can go on and be smart and intelligent. Originally we struggled with the culture. We were babysitters, we had two and three year olds and teenagers. They really didn’t link we were educating kids. That was the hardest thing to change, peoples’ mind sets.

Likewise, Janice stated that although, “…little pockets of rot go on”, she viewed the community as friendly and noticed no major change in the school or community culture. The “pockets of rot” involved parents who disliked the previous principal and they continued to permeate the school community with their negativity and refused to greet her or other staff.

Alternative viewpoints were expressed by Ann and Nan, who commented on negative perceptions of their communities. Ann frequently referred to the “partying culture” of the community and because her husband temporarily worked on one of the cattle stations he was expected to be “a big boozer like them”. She also discerned a class distinction between the property owners and the workers and reported that the attitude
carried over into the school with bullying from some students and parents who expected favoured treatment. Nan also regularly commented on the class structure of the community:

> It’s very class based, from property owners to workers and you see that a lot. People who own properties and have their children there have a different class base...The ones quick to judge are the workers and they judged anyone with money. I had never seen a country school that was so class based like that...I made some good friends up there but at the same time they are all landowners. I came off land as well, my parents own land, so I was put in the same category as well...They were very judgemental and tried to bring people down, especially the worker families.

The issue for Nina, was the perception that parents did not foster academic learning at home, but engendered a sense of racism. Indigenous students were less likely to be accepted by the broader community and on some occasions, by staff. She stated:

> A lot of children come off the land, so it’s traditional. I’d even go so far as to say it’s archaic in their beliefs about how kids should be taught and what school is about. It’s very traditional. They see schools as where kids go to learn and learning doesn’t come from home. The indigenous community was very separate and there was an underlying tone. Some people were openly racist and others said things like, ‘those poor aboriginal kids’...When they come off the land they are isolated and they mix in their own circles and they mix in those for years. I got the sense that they try to portray an understanding of the indigenous situation, but the way they acted didn’t demonstrate that. I wanted to portray a feeling of acceptance in the school. The word tolerance doesn’t suit because if you tolerate, it is because you have to. We have to be accepting of everyone. It’s hard to create a culture of acceptance. It’s difficult to set up if they are not hearing it from home.

A number of incidences contributed to Jill’s negative perceptions about the culture in her school community. She recounted stories of powerbrokers and gender discrimination in the P&C, disharmony and disagreements. She was also aware that the parents negatively influenced the students’ relationships with her:

> I knew all term things were not good, that they were agitating in the community against me. They were actually stopping people at the corner shop and asking the parents if they had any negative comments or problems with me and said they would represent families to the district office...They were agitating and I believe talking in the community that I hit students and I am a bully. It has come back to me.
Even more hurtful for Jill was her treatment by staff. She described the staff culture as “termiting”. When she tried to rectify the relationship by speaking to one of the more outspoken agitators, she realised she would never be accepted:

I sat down with one of the staff one afternoon and made so many attempts with her and said team work is very valuable, but I feel sometimes we are playing different games. She said ‘You’re not on the team are you?’ And I asked how can I get on and she said ‘No, you can’t.’ She acknowledged we are playing different games.

A similarly negative culture was depicted by Eve, who described the community as “Hillbillies. Ignorant people.” She referred to those with experience living elsewhere as “imports” and believed they were more supportive and understanding. When a serious legal matter arose Eve followed departmental policy, but was challenged by the community for her handling of the situation. She was also berated for the way she wrote the newsletter; was condemned for not permitting alcohol on school grounds for student functions; and parents met secretly to criticise her. A negative culture also permeated staff relationships. Eve described the staff as “fractured, defeated and without a team spirit”, due in part to having been, “persecuted, verbally abused, belittled and demeaned in front of kids and other staff”, by the previous principal. Consequently there were opposing responses from the “imports and locals”. As to the community’s hostility, Eve attributed that to a culture of not accepting young females in a position of authority.

6.3.2.2 Personal and professional goals

Five participants claimed they met the professional goals set at the beginning of the year. Sally was proud of improving the students’ reading and writing levels and planned on remaining at the school for another year, after which she would apply for a deputy’s position; and Alice believed that she achieved more in the second half of the year when she was better organised, but was disappointed she did not improve the curriculum to the level she wanted. She intended completing a second year at the school, before seeking relocation to a school in a more populated area.

Similarly, Iris and Janice believed they achieved their goals, but did not plan on applying for higher band schools. Instead, Iris wanted to develop a more vibrant school
culture and Janice intended focusing on improving the students’ academic results, but added that she could be, “tempted to retire and become a retiree”.

Despite not agreeing with the “prep” year philosophy, Nan believed she successfully implemented the “prep” programme. However, early in the year she relinquished the principal’s position in order to return to classroom teaching, but agreed to remain until the end of the year. Nina also decided that her future did not lie in being a principal and had not applied for the substantive position. She was pleased that she accomplished her professional goals and met the new challenges, but was uncertain where her future would take her:

*I didn’t fall flat on my face. I didn’t do a great job, but I’m not sure anyone does, but I was happy with the way I dealt with things as they came up and used it as a learning experience. To be self reflective, I didn’t handle it as well as I could but will handle it differently next time it comes up.*

Meanwhile, although Heather believed the community was pleased with her, her negative experiences led to a re-evaluation of her career goals and consideration of whether she was more suited to a deputy principal’s role. Despite believing a principal should remain in a school for three years, she decided to apply for relocation at the end of her second year:

*You need three years to change something for the better and know it will benefit everyone. Which is why I can see why they want principals to stay, but unfortunately, if people don’t treat them the right way why would you stay? If they are not prepared to do anything to support me why would I stay?*

Unlike those who were satisfied about achieving their goals, Ann believed she had not accomplished hers. Among other things, staff members had been defensive and not supportive of efforts to make the school welcoming. Referring to her initial goal of having a successful and happy year, Ann retorted, “I’m not sure about the happy. Sometimes. There were a couple of low points.” At the beginning of her second year she was reluctant to return to the school, but was told by district office they would not relocate her until she had completed another year. Her personal goal therefore, was to “survive” the year.
Likewise, Eve expressed disappointment that neither her professional goal of everyone celebrating an achievement, nor her personal goal to remain at the school for three years, was met. At the end of her first year Eve was granted a relocation and was re-evaluating her ambitions. She expressed feelings of disillusionment and unhappiness with the education department and as a result, her new goal was to leave education before she turned 40 years of age.

As mentioned earlier, the year had not gone well for Jill. She had not been accepted by the staff or community and consequently did not meet her initial goal of wanting, “to be seen as principal of the school in a good way”. Regardless of the reactions, she was proud of the academic achievement of the students and took pride in their results. At the end of the year Jill’s initial goal of being at the school for at least three years before applying for the principalship of a higher band school, was in abeyance. She was working as a deputy principal in a larger school while district office investigated a complaint made against her. Jill’s goal for her future vacillated between continuing to work as a deputy principal and retiring from education. She concluded by stating:

I have to stop personalising it; I have to think more globally. Think big picture. I have to take the emotion out of it...That’s probably why I felt so bad about myself at the end of the year, because people could talk about me in such a bad way, defamation type stuff, when I really had given it 110%.

In contrast to those participants who recounted negative experiences, Natalie was happy to continue at the school. She believed she met her professional goal of establishing a relationship with the students, parents and P&C, as well as her personal goal of successfully applying for the substantive principal position. She had no definite goals for the future, apart from cementing her position at the school.

6.3.2.3 Stakeholders’ responses

The stakeholders did not refer to the culture of their community, but concentrated on the teaching ability of the teaching principal. Although the teachers expressed concern about the administrative workload distracting the principal from the students, Peggy and Kay commented on the rapport that Nan and Natalie developed with the students. Peggy especially noted that Nan built rapport with a Year 7 boy who was one of only two boys at the school. The second boy was much younger and Nan made a point of playing sport
and spending time with the older boy. However, Peggy added that Nan was not as confident with the younger children, even though she was “...kind to them and supportive.” Meanwhile, Kay stated she was so impressed with Natalie’s disciplining skills that she wanted to spend more time observing her methods. Similar comments about Iris’s classroom management came from Fran. She believed the class was structured in such a way that each student felt they were achieving, were working at an acceptable level and were well behaved.

Likewise, Mary regarded Alice’s behaviour management skills as her strength, stating that she built good rapport in the classroom and the students were well behaved and respectful. However, in comments echoing those of Peggy, Mary believed Alice was less confident with the younger students. She commented that most of the previous teaching principals she worked with were upper school trained and she queried whether a correlation existed between ambition and upper school trained teachers.

Conversely, Mitchell believed that Nina worked best with younger students and commented specifically on the improved literacy results and reading programme Nina introduced into the school.

She was extraordinary with young people, very good, particularly with the preschoolers and Year 1 and Year 2. Extraordinary is the right word. She had the ability to teach, to connect with them.

6.3.3 Administrative duties

Most of the teaching principals were unfamiliar with the administrative duties at the beginning of the year and although they worked at mastering them during the year, commented on the substantial workload, with mixed reactions. Some viewed it as a positive challenge, while others reported feeling negative and disillusioned by the long working days required.

Those with acting principal experiences observed that the volume was what they expected, albeit exhausting and time consuming. Iris’s comment reflected those of other participants:
My catch cry is I still have to do all the things people in big schools have to do; complete all the returns, reports, etc, but only have eight days to do it in. The admin people still have to do all the same things, but they get not even point five to do it in …There’s not enough time to do everything.

Other participants reported that although they expected a large workload, the volume was overwhelming and like Iris, drew attention to the limited working hours of the administrative assistant. Accordingly, Nan stated that in a small school the teaching principal has to, “do everything”; while Nina confessed she was “bewildered” by the workload, but her biggest challenge was “the mountains of paperwork and getting a handle on all the systemic stuff”. Janice described the work as:

I would be on the phone quite a lot, taking calls and getting back to people; writing notes; making sure the newsletter was ready; gardening, because only 5 hours a fortnight were allocated to the groundsperson; chasing snakes all over the place; hacking down bushes; cleaning out store rooms; typing up notes; dealing with irate parents; maintenance and lawn mowing; extracurricular activities like putting exhibits in the show and council; participating in land fill day; fishing competitions; nights and weekend work; P&c meetings; budgeting; communication; making decisions.

Meanwhile, Sally claimed that teaching principals needed to work between ten and fourteen hour days, seven days a week to accomplish all that was required and concluded that the education department was unrealistic in all they expected of the teaching principal:

The first three months were pretty tough. I considered a few times if I would make it through the year...Overall I enjoyed the year and it has been rewarding, but for a while I didn’t think I would enjoy it. As to the work load, I had no idea the amount of work involved...I thought I was prepared but I wasn’t.

Similar comments came from other participants who observed that the administrative workload was more onerous than expected. Ann confessed to being surprised by the amount of “behind the scenes stuff” that a principal needed to deal with and admitted she was sometimes overwhelmed by it all. Whereas Alice acknowledged the assistance provided by an experienced administrative assistant, but admitted she continued to find facility management difficult to comprehend. Heather also rated facility management as one of the more arduous tasks, claiming that at the end of the year she was uncertain if
she was managing it correctly. She worked at least twelve hour days and compared it to the workload of her previous role as deputy principal:

...now I have one day a week to do more than I ever did as a DP. I had to rewrite the behaviour management plan and e-mails are a curse because they keep coming in. District Office always has something that needs to be done. Homework policy needs to be written and plans for ATSI and individual plans had to be in...I knew there would be a lot of work, but I didn’t know the degree it would be. I didn’t think we would have to do everything a big school does because I’m a classroom teacher, but I’m still expected to do everything at the same time as everyone else.

Similar frustrations were expressed by Eve. She was disappointed that the role was not what she expected and she regretted that the administrative tasks took precedence over teaching. In comments similar to those of other participants, she outlined the volume of paperwork that was demanded by district and central offices and concluded by stating, “The whole idea of having a teaching principal is crap” and that the notion of teaching principals was, “past its use by date.” She finished by claiming that a small school was expected to operate like a business, but was not given the support to deny service to impolite community members, or the authority to dismiss unsatisfactory staff.

6.3.3.1 Stakeholders’ Responses

The administrative workload of the teaching principals was again raised by stakeholders at the end of the year. Lois noted that Heather worked between 10 and 12 hours a day during the week, plus Saturday afternoons and Sundays and stated that she needed to, “have a life”. Lois believed Heather managed the administrative work well, but was pleased when she announced that she intended spending less time in the office and more in the classroom during her second year:

She made the decision this year to spend the majority of her time in the classroom, not the office, because she feels she has a better handle on the office this year, but I really feel she should be given more time. She has one day a fortnight to do the same amount of work as a Band 8 principal...There’s a lot of work involved teaching eight grades in one day and the aide hours have been cut back.

Other school staff commented on the teaching principal’s role as being, “a thankless job”, lacking district office support. According to Peggy, insufficient training was
provided prior to moving into the role, “...they are thrown in the deep end and either sink or swim.” Nevertheless, most agreed that the teaching principals successfully managed the workload during the year. Mary admitted that she was initially sceptical about Alice’s ability, but was pleasantly surprised by the way she quickly replaced broken or damaged equipment. She believed that Alice, “...has the school at heart”, but suggested she would be better suited to a deputy principal role in a large school.

Likewise, Fran was impressed with Iris’s administrative skills, although she observed that most of the work was done after school or in the evenings, because so many other things occurred during the day. Her only negative comment was that Iris required time management training, because although she was organised, she was not tidy and tended to leave “stuff” on Fran’s desk as she rushed to complete another task.

The stakeholders repeatedly commented that the teaching principal needed to be well organised. However, Donna and Mary reported that although they were organised in some ways, Janice and Alice were not in others, such as regularly holding staff meetings. According to Mary, more frequent meetings would have kept the staff informed and reduced the “secret society” culture that Alice perpetuated. Nevertheless, Mary believed that compared to some, Alice was one of the better organised principals.

6.3.4 Gender and age

At the end of the year seven of the eleven teaching principals stated their gender had either negatively influenced their acceptance into the community, or were aware of disapproving comments. A further four did not believe it impacted on them personally, but nevertheless believed males were more highly valued and their decisions less likely to be challenged than females.

In the interview at the beginning of the year, Janice expressed her belief that being in the 51-60 years age group would negate negative gender criticism, but at the end of the year reported overhearing one female parent say, “Three quarters of the community would like to see a male running around the playground.” Whereas, Nina found she was considered, “quite young” by the community, but gender did not seem to be an
issue until she became aware of a matter which required police intervention. She was surprised by a comment from the investigating police officer:

*The police officer said he knew I had done my best, but he thought a male principal would be better. It comes back to that traditional thing of roles of males and females. In bigger centres that is not such an issue.*

Other participants also reported combined issues of gender and age. Heather endured ongoing criticism as a result of the community’s preference for the previous male acting principal, but she also overheard comments about her age and perceived lack of experience:

*... community reaction leaves a lot to be desired. There were a few whose reaction to me being female and being young and looking younger than I am, that doesn’t help; but one commented at the end of the year to a staff member “She should never have been allowed to come out here, she’s not old enough or experienced enough.”*

In comments reminiscent of Sinclair (1998) and Celikten (2005) Heather observed that the female community members were less accepting than males. The males who accompanied her on the school camp included her in their jokes and campfire chats, but were equally comfortable when she made decisions and, “reverted to leadership mode”. She found it was the female community members who held a more stereotypic image of gender within social contexts:

*I went to the local races and after the races I went to the public bar and it was commented by a female parent that I should not be there; whereas a male principal would have been more than welcome. Stereotypes.*

Both gender and age were reported as issues by Eve, but she was particularly vocal on the issue of gender:

*I don’t think a male principal would have had the same response. The P&C president said when we replaced the Year 5/6 teacher [for a legal reason], who was a man, “What are the chances of getting a man?” I couldn’t believe it. They had a man there but she didn’t remember that. I should have asked if they wanted someone capable. For them, balls are more important than competence. They would rather have an incompetent male in the role than someone with vision and drive and wants to do the best thing for the kids. They keep putting young women in these places and the community doesn’t want us. There was a female principal in this district who was*
literally run out of town, because she was terrified for her personal safety. Bush women are funny women. They have the perception that a man will do it better; it belittles themselves, but they are indoctrinated that way. We have young women who want to go into the role with good vision but the community does not want them there just because they are females, so they are fighting a losing battle before they even start...We have to manage the unmanageable. We are expected to do such a lot with such little or no training, no or little on ground support...When shit goes down to this extent we have to manage that, even if it is untenable. We have to do it and there seems to be more pressure on young females to do it, because they are young females.

Meanwhile, according to Ann, being a female leader in a remote community was at best a disadvantage. The second teacher, a female, was transferred at the end of Ann’s first year and was replaced by a male graduate teacher with a family. Community reaction surprised her:

The excitement these people have for having a male coming to the community. I explained I asked for a male teacher not because they are better teachers or disciplinarians but to have a balance. One parent said they need a male to discipline, but I said “No”...Men get more acceptance than women in places like this; the assumption is they will be good. Perhaps it’s because there is a scarcity of males.

On the issue of age, Ann did not feel she was discriminated against, but conceded it was worse for the second teacher, who, in her late fifties and unmarried, experienced extreme social isolation:

She wasn’t invited to places one on one. She was a single, elderly female. These people are in their 30s. When we rocked up their eyes popped with shock, when these two grey haired people rocked up.

Contrary to Heather’s comments about female stereotypes and Eve’s comments about “bush women”, Iris found it was the male parents who wanted their children taught by a male. One parent, whose children consistently presented with behaviour problems remarked, “All they need is a male teacher” and another, whose child was a school bully commented, “A male teacher would have a different approach.”

Meanwhile, despite not hearing negative comments about her gender, Alice acknowledged that being a male in a country area would be an advantage. She perceived that a dominant male culture existed, “Masculine stereotype men get the respect before
they have even done anything. Women have to earn it.” Alice’s comments were supported by Natalie, who questioned whether her decisions would have been more readily accepted had they been made by a male:

I think it would be different if you were a male. All went well for me, but there were times when I couldn’t help thinking that opinions wouldn’t be questioned if I was a male. I hate the fact I think that way. I do the job as best as anyone. But there are times when I can’t help but smile and think where would this situation be right now if I was a male?...The community didn’t make any comments that I’m aware of, so it’s unfair to make assumptions but there’s a stigma out there in small rural communities.

Regardless of the issues which confronted Jill during the year, she did not attribute them to age or gender, but rather to personality. She observed, “I don’t think I had any backlash because I was female. Even a male coming in would have had trouble”. However upon reflection, like Natalie, she queried whether some staff may have more readily accepted her comments if they came from a male rather than from a female.

Making a broader observation, Nan echoed Clarke and Stevens (2006) comments that the first choice for a principal in a small community was a married male; second choice was a single male; third choice was a married female regardless of teaching experience; and the least preferred option was an unmarried female, regardless of experience and competence:

Males would gain a lot more respect; especially a lot more than an unmarried female. The girl in here now has only been teaching two years but she’s married. It’s a big difference...Sometimes I think a man would be much the same as I am, but not getting into the bitchy stuff; whereas a female can get involved in the bitchiness. So it becomes more standoffish and that’s not such a bad thing in a small community like that. In those jobs I think a man would be a lot better.

6.3.4.1 Stakeholders’ responses

According to Lois, the community was definitely male oriented with females not perceived as strong enough to provide discipline. On the other hand, she believed Heather’s organisational and leadership skills were superior to the previous male acting teaching principal. In comments similar to those made earlier by Heather, Lois stated
that female teaching principals, who drank too much in the local hotel, ran the risk of not being accepted by the community:

Drinking gets them offside too. Not so much for a male, but if a female is at the pub that would be different. Luckily none have been like that. Strangely enough they expect us to be on a pedestal and be perfect. It’s life in a gold fish bowl.

Similar comments came from Kay, who observed that although gender had not impacted on Natalie’s acceptance, she was aware that the community thought a male would do a better job. Kay mirrored Heather’s comments when she observed that it was the females in the community who complained about other females and she admitted to overhearing some community members say that a male would be better at sorting out problems in the school and community.

Meanwhile, Peggy did not perceive gender as an issue for Nan, as in the past twenty years only two teaching principals had been males. However, she conceded that the “honeymoon period” lasted longer for males. Peggy also believed gender issues were negated for Nan because she grew up in a rural environment and therefore could talk about properties, crops and wild pig shooting.

On the other hand, Fran and Gemma believed a male principal was better for male students, who were more inclined to accept authority from a male. Gemma attributed that reaction to home lives without a male role model, while Fran explained:

They don’t take authority from a woman well. They try to buck it. Perhaps it’s because men sound gruffer, or have that air about them, they tend to take it from men. Sometimes you miss the male around the school...With discipline issues the male seems to get through to the boys better, I think.

Donna also remarked on the authoritative voices of males and gave as an example an elderly male supply teacher who experienced no behavioural problems, while a female supply teacher found it difficult to manage the students. Donna confessed that she personally wanted a male on staff to carry heavy packages and to go on school camps with male students, but declared she preferred a female in a position of authority:
Because we get in and do it and not pussy foot around. I have worked for a male principal and he pussy footed too much and tried to be buddy, buddy. You can’t do that with kids.

In comparing Janice to previous males in the role Donna stated:

From what I hear and observe now, the kids are sitting at their desks and there’s no chatter, they are in doing their work...She’s different with the kids. She handles things straight away. Before, it would be kids outside on the verandah and it would be sorted out later.

Meanwhile, according to Mitchell, the only community expectation Nina did not meet, was gender. Community members confided in him that they would respect her more if she was a married male with children, came from the community, managed the football team and joined them at the hotel for a beer.

6.3.5 Community and Rural Living

At the end of the year six of the eleven teaching principals stated they were comfortable living in a rural and remote area. Of those six, three were in remote and three in rural areas; three were married; two were in the 20-30 year age group, one was in the 31-40 year age group, and three were in the 51-60 year age group.

6.3.5.1 Impact of isolation and gaining acceptance into the community

Feelings of isolation and loneliness were the primary reasons behind the dissatisfaction reported by the other five participants. Four of the five were in remote areas; three were in the 20-30 year age group, one was in the 31-40 year age group and one was in the 41-50 year age group. Only one was married. Table 6.4 summarises the characteristics of all eleven teaching principals in relation to this theme.
Table 6.4  Responses to rural and remote living

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Area Classification</th>
<th>School Band</th>
<th>√ Satisfied</th>
<th>X Dissatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iris</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nan</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janice</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The younger participants commented on the isolation of living in a small school community with no entertainment facilities, social outlets, or shopping opportunities. Alice voiced their reactions when she said:

*Out there, there is nowhere to go. I feel it’s a life sentence. I don’t want to be alone. The isolation is a big thing. At my age I want to be around people, going to coffee and stuff.*

Observations Eve made at the beginning of the year regarding lack of privacy were upheld in her second interview. She reported feeling under surveillance throughout the year and believed the community took note of what she did and how she lived. Moreover, she found it difficult living with the natural elements in a country environment:

*It’s awful! It’s the pits! Especially when there is no town. Everyone drives past and makes comment about whether you are home or not, the colour of your curtains, whether the lawn needs mowing. Just because you are living in the community eyes are constantly on you. Plus, when the power goes off, the water goes off, and there are toads under the house and snakes.*

The oldest and only married participant to convey a negative reaction was Ann. She was particularly vocal about the lack of privacy and poor departmental accommodation, which contributed to her sense of isolation and disillusionment. The house was close to the road and therefore in view of everyone who passed, “They know when I’ve done the
“washing.” Furthermore, as “a new comer”, she found it difficult in social situations to find topics she felt comfortable discussing:

*I have to modify myself. Close off bits of myself to suit the community, because I’m always on show. Not just on show, but being judged all the time…Everything I say whizzes around the community. Gossip is terrible. Not just about me, I hear it about others. They need to find something to do.*

On the other hand, having been raised in a small town, Natalie was more comfortable living in a remote area than in a city or regional centre:

*Only a couple of days ago I met a staff member’s daughter and she asked where I call home and I said “Here”. I’ve made this home and enjoy it. I love it.*

Likewise, with earlier experience living in a remote area, Sally continued to describe herself as happy living in a small community. In anticipation of transferring to a similar location, Sally bought several acres of land in an equivalent sized community.

Unlike Natalie or Sally, Iris had grown up and spent most of her adult years in Brisbane, but she identified with the small school community and reported being happy there. She acknowledged there was a tendency for community members to be aware of everyone’s business, but she did not find that intrusive. Meanwhile, Jill and Janice observed that they were in more civilised locations than their previous schools. Janice added that she and her husband had once owned a small property in, “the middle of nowhere”, so she was quite content with the size of the current community.

6.3.5.2 Stakeholders’ responses

Despite not being the community’s first choice of principal, Lois believed Heather managed the situation well and by the end of the year was accepted by 90% of the community. She accomplished this by shopping locally, speaking with community members, attending charity and hospital functions and by writing positive newsletter items. Lois observed that by the end of the year Heather was more resilient and did not allow the community’s 10% who continued to be rude and swear at her, to impact on her professionalism. Lois also noted that the community did not draw a distinction between Heather as the school principal and Heather as the community member and
expected her to discipline students outside school hours, “She’s never not the principal”.

Likewise, Kay believed Natalie was accepted by staff and community members because she encouraged staff dinners and get togethers and attended community events, including those not associated with the school. Of particular significance was that Natalie did not travel away from the area at weekends or holidays. Fran and Donna also believed Iris and Janice were well accepted in their communities as they participated in social events, worked at functions organised by the community and their husbands volunteered at various events.

Alice’s relationship with the community was viewed as two-dimensional. Mary believed that on the one hand the community appreciated her communication through newsletters and notes, but on the other hand, were disturbed by her frequent absences from the school. Furthermore, Mary described Alice as “snappy and snarly” and moody, which impacted on the staff relationship with her, as they were uncertain what to expect. In addition, she was not tactful when discussing sensitive student issues with parents, although Mary added, “…sometimes that’s part of your personality, it’s in your makeup”. Mary concluded:

*Some people are okay in this sort of place, but Alice is a real people person; she likes dropping around for a cup of coffee, which you can do in the city, but it’s not as easy out here.*

Meanwhile, Peggy observed that married teaching principals were at an advantage when it came to acceptance. The new teaching principal, who replaced Nan, was an inexperienced teacher, but because she was married, her husband previously worked locally and her family lived in a similar area close by, she was accepted more readily than Nan. Reflecting research findings by Wildy (2004) Peggy observed that although Nan was friendly and with prior experience working in a rural community, she made no overt effort to build relationships within the community.

Maintaining a similar view, Mitchell advised that Nina participated in fund raising activities for the school and stayed in town most weekends, but did not become involved in the general social activities in the community. Regardless, he did not
believe the community held teachers in as high a regard as they did doctors, but believed teachers needed to be appreciated for all they did for students. He recommended that the education department provide beginning teaching principals in small rural and remote communities with an “awareness package” containing information on dealing with indigenous students, confidentiality and reporting abuse.

6.3.6 Expectations

6.3.6.1 Community expectations

Some teaching principals referred back to their early perceptions of the community’s expectations. For instance, at the beginning of the year Sally believed the community placed a high value on education, but later discovered they expected the school to feed the students and provide a babysitting service to underage children, “No one asked how well the kids were reading or writing, but asked, ‘what did they have for lunch?’.” Sally set about changing the community’s expectations and at the end of the year believed she succeeded.

On the other hand, Nina’s early notion about the stakeholders’ expecting a high level of input, proved accurate, but she was surprised by where they sought to contribute:

The community wanted lots of input, but it was input not about the curriculum, or the day to day learning, it was an issue like why can’t we have pies in the tuck-shop? Or, we have white sports shirts and they didn’t wear them because not everyone had one, but those sorts of things became huge.

Conversely, at the beginning of the year Nan believed the stakeholders would be involved in the school, but was disappointed to find that the P&C was not active, meetings were frequently cancelled due to insufficient numbers; few activities were arranged; and they did not attend the functions she organised. She believed she met their expectations for student outcomes, but not their social expectations, as she decided early in the year to limit social contact.

Contrary to Nan, Iris developed a positive relationship with the P&C and although they were few in numbers, they were supportive. However, she failed to meet reporting
deadlines and therefore did not meet district office expectations. On the other hand, Natalie and Alice believed they met district office expectations, although Alice remarked, “...but whether it was to their standard is another thing. But I’m confident I did a good job.” Meanwhile, Natalie determined that due to her age the staff were initially unwilling to accept directions, but by the end of the year were co-operative; and based on the P&Cl efforts to obtain financial grants for the school, they were also satisfied with her.

By way of contrast, Heather believed she met the expectations of district office, but not those of staff, “...and I don’t know why.” She was informed that some staff did not think she communicated well, or shared decision making and the SOS data indicated a decrease in satisfaction across all areas (i.e. Relationships; School Operations; Staff Morale; Support, Resources and Training; Work Roles; and Work Value and Recognition). She attributed the responses to an unfavourable comparison to the male acting principal from the previous year.

Neither Eve nor Jill was confident about the stakeholders’ expectations. Eve did not believe the P&Cl supported her and when she sought their input into school documents, they were dismissive; and rather than welcoming her fresh approach, actively worked against her decisions. Jill made similar comments, particularly in relation to staff who were openly antagonistic toward her. She referred to the SOS data as proof of their dissatisfaction.

6.3.6.2 Expectations of self

At the end of the year five participants stated they met their own expectations. For example, Sally believed she successfully established rapport with all stakeholders and contributed to a significant improvement in the students’ academic results. Likewise, Iris met her expectation of improving student results, although she admitted that at times during the year she could not see any progress but, “I look back and think, yeah, I got there.”
Meanwhile, Nan was pleased that she accomplished the administrative tasks, “...because I’m not a paperwork person.” However, she believed she could have, “done a better job” and developed a more positive relationship with parents:

I was disappointed in the way I gave up in the end and said you will never change them. But as a teacher and administrator I was happy with what I did.

Despite the negative reaction she received, Jill believed she met her own expectations of managing the school. Her accomplishments included successfully implementing and completing projects and receiving substantial financial grants to undertake work at the school. Jill concluded by stating, “I did all the stuff a good principal should be doing.” Ann also reflected on her dual expectations of managing the school and curriculum and mentioned a number of initiatives she instigated and the whole of school spelling programme she successfully developed.

Upon reflection, Natalie and Alice observed that they “sometimes” met their own expectations and that there were both positive and negative times. For Natalie, the positives included successfully applying for the substantive principal position and developing a positive relationship with parents and the P&C; whereas for Alice, while acknowledging there were certain things she could have done better, was satisfied that as a young person in her first principal’s role, she met her own expectations. She concluded by stating, “I had high expectations of myself.”

On the other hand, neither Eve nor Heather believed they met their expectations. Eve argued that the hostile community and unco-operative staff thwarted her plans for collaborative leadership and refused to participate in moving the school forward. As a result, she reluctantly took on an autocratic leadership style. Meanwhile, Heather was disappointed that she, “…didn’t change anything for the better” and that she allowed a few negative parents to impact on her emotional wellbeing, “It makes me feel as if I failed.”

6.3.6.3 Stakeholders’ responses

The stakeholders’ opinions of the teaching principals meeting community expectations were varied. The previous sections have addressed those aspects, especially in relation
to building social relationships, remaining in the area at weekends, shopping locally and participating in non-school related functions. The other expectation that was mentioned several times was the gender of the teaching principal. As Mitchell commented, that was the one expectation that Nina did not meet – she was not a male.

6.3.7 Personal factors

Nine of the participants rated unpleasant exchanges with students’ parents as major sources of stress. Nina and Ann experienced difficulties with parents while arranging their school camps and while the number of parents involved was small - only one in Ann’s community and three in Nina’s - the level of stress was high and persisted throughout the year. Nina’s issue started with the finances for the school camp but led on to other matters:

*In the end I thought they were accusing me of stealing...We are audited and we are accountable. Five or six parents rang and said they were sorry I was going through it. From that, there was another little problem with those same parents around Melbourne Cup Day. I said students would not be watching the race in class and they phoned district office and complained.*

Stressful parent issues for Nan included a parent calling a meeting of parents to complain about Nan, but not including her supporters; and for Janice, a parent who was, “swearing, cursing and blaming me” when a student was involved in physical violence with other girls outside school hours. Janice became increasingly stressed and confessed she did not handle the situation well, “I wasn’t reading the signs”. One of the learning outcomes of Janice’s year was, “There are different types of people out there and I have to learn to get along with them.” While stress for Heather came from a parent who challenged her decisions, made frequent telephone calls to district office and swore at her; and for Alice, parents complaining to district office about her being out of the school too often attending professional development.

Several participants rated facility issues as being particularly stressful. For instance, Sally explained that some equipment, such as the water pump and generator, required a “knack” to operate which had not been explained to her and when she contacted Q Build for assistance, they asked questions she was unable to answer. While Ann
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described attempting to negotiate with Q Build to improve the rain water tank at the house and about the “sub-standard” accommodation for her and the other teacher:

_We are living in a donga, like a retirement unit...It’s a re-locatable home. It has 2 bedrooms and once the queen bed is in that’s it, there’s no room for anything else...We couldn’t bring our own furniture; we had to modify what we brought out. It doesn’t feel like home...There’s only bore water and we have no drinking water in the house. We have to go to the school to the tank for water...I think the more remote you are the better the accommodation should be so we can concentrate on other stuff._

Two major stressors impacted on Eve during the year. The first involved a child safety issue which she was required, by law, to report to police. Although parents complained about how she dealt with the situation, she felt vindicated because other students came forward to report abuse:

_Kids started feeling they could trust people and stories came out of the woodwork...It had either never been reported before or was ignored...The community decided I had done the wrong thing; the previous principal would have gone with the parents for a cup of coffee. They wouldn’t understand that it is the law. They wouldn’t listen...Still, at the end of the year, people were saying I had done the wrong thing. From that point they decided I was young and didn’t know what I was doing...At the end of the day, me and the school community did not match._

The second stressor occurred early in the year when a cyclone struck the area. She was isolated at the school without water or electricity and no means of communication. When electricity failed, so did the landline telephone system and mobile phones. After the cyclone passed, Eve discovered possessions she had stored in her car for safe keeping, had been stolen. Within days the area was flooded and inaccessible to trades people assigned to repair the school and house and she received little support from the community or staff.

To combat the stress, Nina exercised by walking each day, although she confessed that she also, “_ate a lot of chocolate_”; Sally adopted a regime of running and exercising by using a punching bag; and Alice, who developed a habit of working late in the evenings and at weekends, initially drank too much alcohol, but later reduced her working hours, stopped drinking alcohol, became involved in touch football and commenced singing lessons.
The stress management strategy that worked for Nan was to leave the community most weekends; while Eve eventually moved to a small town nearby and commuted to school. After relocating she felt more relaxed and, “...put a plan together for my life”, which included walking her dogs and reading for enjoyment, rather than trying to absorb departmental policy. Meanwhile, Ann reported she was so stressed and the heat so extreme that she lost motivation to exercise and living in limited accommodation, was unable to participate in her hobby of patchwork and quilting. Instead, she bought a larger television and DVD player and spent her free time watching movies or reading, but because she gained weight through inactivity, her stress levels rose even higher.

Neither Natalie nor Heather was able to clearly define which stress management strategies they used. Natalie advised she was unsure how she managed her stress, but circumstances dictated how she responded and that, “Somewhere along the line it always gets done”. Likewise, Heather did not have a plan, but it did not work out as well for her. Her only solution when she was, “…finally at breaking point,” and reduced to hysteria, was to contact district office for assistance.

To deal with stress Janice joined a local theatre group, but her primary strategy was to believe in what she was doing and to offer herself rewards, “I break it into chunks...If I stick this out for two weeks, I can go home”. Whereas Jill and Iris found that talking to their husbands about issues helped overcome the stress. Jill added that when the more serious issues arose during the second half of the year she comfort ate and did not exercise, but she also found support from a network of other principals and from the Queensland Association of State School Principals (QASSP). Meantime, Iris determined to ease the pressure she placed on herself and developed a new philosophy:

Knowing the ideal is to know what acceptable is and be prepared to deal with the practical in between. It’s about reality.

Some participants nominated other principals as well as their family and friends as support networks, while five positively rated support provided by district office staff. However, others were more critical about district office and complained of insufficient support and feedback about issues from their supervisor, the Executive Director (Schools). As new teaching principals they expected district office personnel to contact them, monitor their progress and provide support. They believed that when a new
principal was under pressure they were reluctant to contact district office for fear of being evaluated as not coping.

During the open coding process of data analysis comments regarding future career plans of the teaching principals were raised and noted. Although these were considered part of the core category of Personal Factors, it was determined to present them separately in this dissertation and are outlined in the following section. As the careers of the teaching principals were monitored over the ensuing five years (see Appendix E), the plans at the end of the year are worth noting.

6.3.7.1 Future plans

At the end of the year only Natalie expressed satisfaction with the year and her willingness to remain at the school. She judged the year successful and that she, “...can’t complain about my first year as a principal”. She wished to remain at the school for at least the following three years, but was unclear where her career would subsequently lead. She expressed mixed feelings about, “...climbing the ladder or trying another school of the same size”, or finding a partner, marrying and having children of her own.

Being in a remote area, Sally was only required to remain at the school for two years and although she was willing stay, found the 40 degree heat almost unbearable. Sally assessed the year as a good experience but, “...as to the workload, I had no idea the amount of work involved.” She was uncertain where her future would lead, but observed that leading an indigenous school did not equip her for leading a larger school elsewhere. She was therefore considering applying for a deputy principal’s role:

In this community I have had success. I’m not sure if I am successful. I have had success personally and had success in the school, but I’m not sure I would be successful everywhere.

Despite not wanting to do so, both Heather and Ann were obliged to remain in their respective communities for a second year. At the commencement of the interview Heather summed up her feelings about the year, “It was crap!” Even though she enjoyed the administrative work she observed:
I knew there would be a lot of work but I didn’t know the degree it would be. I didn’t think we would have to do everything a big school does because I’m a classroom teacher, but we’re still expected to do everything at the same time as everyone else.

Originally, Heather planned on working at the school for three years, but at the end of the year telephoned district office and asked to be removed from the school, but was convinced to remain another year. She cited lack of support from district office and the community, as reasons for not wishing to remain. She believed that having a partner, or family, living with her may have improved her year, as there were times she felt isolated without someone on whom to “download”. She was uncertain about her future career, but remarked that her previous role as a deputy principal was less demanding than being a teaching principal.

Like Heather, Ann telephoned district office at the end of the year and asked to be removed, but was told she needed to complete two years before applying elsewhere. Apart from the poor accommodation, she did not believe there was sufficient support from district office and that she had to reach crisis point before they assisted. She considered district office should be more available and more caring, because new teaching principals, regardless of age, “...are only just finding their feet”.

For those in the younger age group, such as Alice and Nina, the isolation and lack of social outlets were the reasons for wishing to relocate. Alice planned on completing her second year at the school before relocating to another small school in the state’s south east, or becoming a deputy principal in a larger school. Conversely, Nina did not wish to continue as a principal, but was successful in her application for a HOC position in a school in the south east.

It was a little different for Nan, as she relinquished the teaching principal role early in the year but stayed until its end. Apart from her opposition to “prep” year in small schools, Nan did not believe enough support was offered to teaching principals and the training offered in Brisbane and regional centres did not address the realities of the position. Eve also relinquished her role as principal and accepted the position of HOC. Eve’s decision was fuelled by the aftermath of two child abuse matters; a cyclone which created personal and professional hardships; unresponsive and uncooperative staff; and
negative community reaction to her being a female. Eve was unable to voice her future plans, other than it would not be in education:

*I walked into that place with a career plan of moving up. In that one year I dealt with more than most Band 8 principals do in 5 years. I now have no respect for EQ as an entity...It has become too big. They are not thinking about their people, or about where society is heading. I don’t need to be abused all the time. I don’t need to feel unsafe. Why am I doing this to myself?...I have decided that by the time I’m 40 I’ll be out.*

The two older participants, Janice and Iris, commented that they saw little chance of promotion due to their ages. Despite the year’s challenges, Janice believed the year was successful, but she was contemplating whether to remain at school, or to retire. Iris made similar observations, stressing that her husband had already retired and she may do so in the near future.

Meanwhile, Jill admitted that due to the workload, coupled with difficulties with staff and some parents, she was also considering retirement. At the time of the second interview Jill was working as a deputy principal in a large school while she awaited the outcome of a departmental investigation into allegations against her. She was therefore unable to formulate any cohesive plans for the future. For further detail regarding how the careers of the eleven teaching principals progressed, see Appendix E.

### 6.4 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the firsthand accounts of being a female beginning teaching principal in a small rural and remote area, by twelve females living that reality. The influence their experiences exerted on them was presented through the seven themes identified during the analysis stage of this study.

The first section of the chapter examined the participants’ responses prior to commencing at the school. The general consensus of both the teaching principals and stakeholders was that communication was the cornerstone to successful leadership, along with personal characteristics of being decisive, honest, well organised, friendly and interested in the community and students outside school hours. The other overriding
belief was that being a classroom teacher was the most important aspect of the role, although concern was expressed about the duality of the role and the administrative workload.

Despite believing gender would not negatively impact on their acceptance, several of the teaching principals expressed an understanding that a stereotypic view persisted in rural and remote areas that males were natural leaders, were sporting enthusiasts and better disciplinarians. Some stakeholders confirmed this opinion by confessing that they personally preferred male principals. The younger teaching principals also expressed apprehension about being considered too young and inexperienced for the role.

The final portion of this section addressed the teaching principals’ career goals. Most preferred not to make a definitive statement about their futures, but possible scenarios included advancing to being a principal in a larger school, being a deputy principal, or returning to the classroom as a teacher.

The second section of this chapter considered the teaching principals’ accounts at the end of their first year in the role and observations from the stakeholders. Eleven teaching principals and eight stakeholders took part in these interviews.

Communication and decision making continued to be viewed as the two leadership skills most essential for a teaching principal. However, some of the teaching principals recognised that their own leadership style changed during the year for a variety of reasons.

The anticipation, at the beginning of the year, that the workload would be substantial was confirmed during the year. There was agreement that the administrative workload overshadowed the teaching component of the role and they compared it to the workload of a non-teaching principal with a deputy principal and full time administrative staff. Several of the teaching principals also argued that there was insufficient support from district office personnel and training did not meet their contextual needs.

All the teaching principals, including those not personally vilified, believed that a male was the preferred choice of principal in a rural and remote school. Most of the stakeholders agreed that the communities were gender biased and that male students
reacted differently to discipline from a male than they did from a female. In addition, personality and background were seen to influence acceptance into a community.

There was a mixed reaction to living in an isolated area, with six of the teaching principals indicating that they were comfortable, but five reporting feelings of isolation and loneliness. They missed the social outlets of regional and city areas and the lack of anonymity that came from living in an isolated area.

At the end of the year the teaching principals’ career plans changed from those at the beginning of the year. Three ceased to be teaching principals; Jill was under investigation following complaints; two believed that due to age they would not be offered promotion; a further three reluctantly agreed to remain in the community for one more year; and Sally was prepared to spend another year in the community but was looking forward to relocating the following year, due to weather conditions. Only Natalie was willing to remain indefinitely at the school. An overview of the career paths of each of the eleven teaching principals over the ensuing five years is provided in Appendix E.

The following chapter will discuss changes in perceptions across the two time periods and place those experiences within the context of educational leadership research. Based on the observations of the teaching principals and stakeholders, conclusions can be drawn as to which factors are perceived to positively contribute to a female being successful in her first year as principal.
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction
The focus of this study was to examine the leadership experiences of female beginning teaching principals within rural and remote small school communities, with the aim of identifying specific gender and social elements that contribute to successful female leadership in small school communities. The previous chapter presented the teaching principals’ and stakeholders’ perceptions at the beginning of the year and at its end, in relation to the seven themes identified in Chapter 5. Those themes were leadership; school and teaching; administrative duties; gender and age; community and rural living; expectations; and personal factors. This chapter will discuss the participants’ perceptions in order to explore the similarities and differences between the two sets of interviews and the two groups of participants, over the year long time frame. In doing this, it will draw on relevant literature to situate the work in the body of knowledge within gender and educational leadership.

7.2 Leadership
7.2.1 Skills required for effective school leadership
There was little difference in the teaching principals’ perceptions of successful leadership skills between the two interviews. Communication was consistently identified as a primary tool of the successful leader, despite several interpretations of the micro skills it incorporated. Some participants suggested being a good listener and encouraging others to participate as signifying good communication, while others noted it meant ensuring stakeholders were kept informed through newsletters and communication books.

The stakeholders were also outspoken with regards to effective school leadership and they perceived communication as an essential component of good leadership. They wanted the teaching principal to inform them of her expectations, to consult with them and to share her vision for the school. There was a mixture of responses from
stakeholders at the end of the year regarding how well their expectations of communication were met. For instance, Heidi, Natalie, Nina, Janice and Iris were singled out as demonstrating effective communication by keeping staff informed; listening to suggestions; responding to requests; keeping parents informed about students’ progress; consulting the P&C (Parents and Citizens Association); and being active in the community. Whereas Nan and Alice were cited as representing poor communication skills, by failing to keep staff informed; not participating in social conversations with staff; being “grumpy”; and taking parents’ comments personally.

Leadership literature confirms that communication is a key factor in the success of school principals regardless of school size, as it is the ability of the principal to communicate, to motivate and inspire staff and to establish positive relationships, that sets effective principals apart from those who simply manage the school (Butt & Retallick, 2002; Cue, 2003; Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2009; Gilley et al, 2009; Johns et al, 2001; Sherman, 2000; Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002). In fact, Drysdale et al (2009) cited communication as one of the factors that singled out a female principal as “turning around an underperforming school” (p. 697) and Lysaught (1984) summed up the importance of communication by stating, “More frequently than not, failures in communication lie at the heart of problems in organizations” (p 102).

In this study, as in most schools, the principal was required to communicate with several different audiences. As a result, it is often assumed, as Grace did about Nan, that principals are trained in communication. The opposite is often the case. Although they communicate with students at the classroom level, few teachers receive training in communicating with adults outside the classroom (Bamburg, 2002). Following a study of 375 school staff Bulach, Pickett and Boothe (1997) concluded, “The overall climate of a school is affected by the number of mistakes an administrator makes” (p 3) and cited communication as one of the major exemplars of effective leadership. Communication criticisms included continuing with paperwork when being spoken to; not making eye contact; neglecting to use staff members’ names; failing to compliment staff; reprimanding staff in front of others (Bulach et al, 1997); and as Mary stated about Alice, failing to mingle with staff.
Decision making was also raised as a leadership skill at the beginning of the year when participants acknowledged that some of their decisions would not be popular. However, they believed stakeholders could be convinced of the validity of the decisions and would eventually accept them. At the end of the year they were more aware of the repercussions of their decisions and that stakeholders did not necessarily comply. They related stories of making difficult decisions with negative outcomes. Nan made the point that the principal was ultimately responsible for all decisions and it was impossible to take everyone’s opinions into account; while Iris referred to “biting the bullet” when making unpopular decisions, followed by the need to be, “tough in the face of crisis”. They discovered that keeping the stakeholders happy was not always possible. However, the stakeholders indicated that they wanted the teaching principal to make a decision and stand by it, regardless of the reaction. According to Gemma, a strong leader was able to move on from conflict about a decision and separate their professional and personal lives; while Lois singled Heather out as a leader who stood by difficult decisions, especially when they were made in the best interests of the students.

Other skills listed by the teaching principals at both the beginning of the year and end of year interviews, were time management and organisation. In both interviews the first characteristic Alice mentioned a teaching principal required, was organisation. She was supported by other participants, such as Natalie, who declared that managing time equated to being organised and a manageable workload. The research literature agreed that the duality of the administrative and teaching workload necessitated strong time management and organisational skills (Clarke, 2002a, c, 2003; Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Clarke & Wildy, 2004, 2011; Lester, 2001, 2003).

The stakeholders also asserted that the workload, combined with the school’s remoteness, demanded that the teaching principal be well organised and have effective time management skills. From a practical perspective they pointed out that in isolated areas arranging activities away from the school required organisational expertise, especially when it came to ordering resources and arranging transport. Overall, the comments at the end of the year were favourable, although one of the discordant issues was a lack of staff meetings in small schools where staff worked part time and therefore not all were present on any one day. Stakeholders suggested that a failure to hold staff
meetings decreased the level of communication and their involvement. The stakeholders also observed that a new teaching principal should not make sudden changes to school procedures, but wait and assess if changes were necessary. Similarly, they argued that a new teaching principal should not make frequent references to the way processes occurred at her previous school.

7.2.2 Personal leadership style
Five of the eleven teaching principals stated that during the year their view of leadership changed, while seven indicated they were forced to adapt their style to suit the community.

The changes in perception during the year were brought about by events not previously anticipated. For instance, Eve and Jill asserted that the stakeholders rejected their leadership styles, which lead to outright conflict. Other unexpected issues included becoming emotionally involved and taking decisions personally; being seen “as a push over”; not knowing how to have difficult conversations with parents; and needing to prove their competency as a teacher and leader, all of which led to high levels of stress and altered perceptions of leadership. In an examination of small school principals in Scotland, Jones (2006) identified that stress, exacerbated by the way the role was perceived by the public; how it was managed by the employing body; and by insufficient training and support, was a major factor in teaching principals exiting the role.

As a result of the year’s experiences, some participants in this study developed a broader understanding of the restrictions placed on teaching principals, which in turn reduced confidence in their own leadership style. Natalie observed that she found it difficult to think of herself as a leader and Ann stated, “I’m not sure what a leader is and what is required of them”.

7.2.3 Potential leadership obstacles
The potential obstacles noted at the beginning of the year were similar to those reported at its end. The participants identified that the primary obstacles were the workload and trying to please everyone. At the end of the year they acknowledged that it took until the
second half of the year before they reduced their working hours and in some cases they spent the year trying to please everyone. Janice recommended that rather than trying to please everyone, a beginning principal needed to concentrate on the classroom and developing a relationship with students, whereas Nan recommended learning to say “No” more frequently.

Meanwhile, Alice observed that an obstacle for a young female with no facilities training, was not listening to experienced stakeholders who warned a building contractor was not observing appropriate building codes; whereas Nina warned against giving parents too much information. By responding to questions from parents about the school budget, she inadvertently discussed aspects that were not relevant to parents and they subsequently ceased to trust her. While for Sally, the foremost obstacle was not consulting the community before throwing out items she considered irrelevant. She cautioned that what may not seem relevant to a new-comer, could be considered essential by the community.

Several participants commented that one of the obstacles was the fear of asking for advice and support, either from an experienced colleague, or from district office. Jill and Heather both emphasised the need to ask for assistance before the situation became unmanageable. However, they also stipulated that teaching principals needed to take responsibility to ask for assistance, because district offices seldom provided support until they were asked.

Another identified obstacle to leadership in a rural and remote community was insufficient information about the community prior to accepting the role. The teaching principals recommended gaining as much knowledge as possible before deciding whether to undertake the position.

7.2.4 Perceived training needs
During the year some participants underwent significant changes in their opinion of the training they required. For instance, at the beginning of the year Jill’s major concern was technology, but at the end of the year believed she needed to learn more about becoming assertive; while Sally, who initially sought training in leadership, at the end
of the year identified emotional resilience, confidence and time management as her training needs. Furthermore, eight participants initially expressed apprehension regarding their lack of administrative knowledge, especially with departmental computer programmes, report writing and financial management, but at the end of the year no one sought training in these areas. Similarly, at the commencement of the year some participants were concerned about teaching multi age classes, but at the end of the year made no reference to further training.

Leadership training was discussed from different perspectives across both interviews. Although the need for a mentor was not raised in the first interview, at the end of the year four participants suggested the value of a mentoring programme and Janice suggested work shadowing. Alice and Nan, who initially stated they required training in managing multi age classes and in financial management, determined at the end of the year that they would benefit from having an experienced Band 5 principal as a mentor. Alice added that she was less in need of training and more in need of practice as a principal to perfect her skills.

Considerable research supporting the efficacy of mentors for school principals, especially beginning principals, exists (Clutterbuck, 2000; Cotton, 2011; Hobson, 2003; Lester, 2003; Luck, 2003; Mertz, 2004; O’Mahony & Matthews, 2006; Thomas & Kearney, 2010). Findings from Luck’s (2003) research into the merit of mentoring with beginning principals, pointed to the value of continuing the mentoring relationship into the second year in the role. Participants in Luck’s study argued that they concentrated on the “nitty-gritty” (p 9) in their first year, but were more prepared to think strategically in the second year and a mentor would contribute to that process. Meanwhile, despite agreeing with the concept of mentors, Thomas and Kearney (2010) advocated that beginning principals not be placed in, “…the most difficult environments in their early years” (p 10).

Essentially, beginning teaching principals sought leadership training, not from a philosophical perspective, but rather from a school based viewpoint, including instruction in financial and budgeting aspects, facilities management and working with underperforming staff. The findings from this study were consistent with other researchers who proposed that leadership training could not be prescriptive with set
patterns and ways of operating, but rather should be tailored to each school’s context (Riley & MacBeath, 2003).

Similar findings were reported in an earlier study of Queensland principals, who claimed they were offered a three day seminar at the beginning of the year, which tended to focus on non-teaching principals rather than teaching principals and those who commenced during the year received no training (Lester, 2001). Lester’s research was followed by other Queensland studies which identified that 68% of participating teaching principals found their induction programme to be insufficient and they wanted practical management issues addressed, rather than abstract leadership notions (Clarke, 2002, 2003). Put more succinctly, principal training should focus on, “...practical, hands-on, get-me-through-the-first-year-so-I-can-survive stuff” (Howley et al, 2002, p 183).

More recently, following their research into the training needs of principals in Western Australia and Queensland, Wildy and Clarke (2008) concluded that, “...preparation for the role is left largely to chance” (p 730). While an Australia wide study of 683 rural principals, with 82% in their first principalship, found that 46% were given no training for the role and 29% received only short course preparation (Halsey, 2011). Halsey supported learning on the job, but also advocated that leaders learn how contextual issues impacted on their leadership.

The findings from this study supported the research noted above. There was general agreement from the teaching principals that training, especially on practical administrative issues, such as financial and facility management and maintenance of equipment, was lacking. As a result, they recommended future training should address local contextual issues.

7.3 School and teaching

7.3.1 Knowledge of school and community culture and its impact

At the beginning of the year the participants possessed limited knowledge of the community culture; having gained small snippets from the previous principal, district office, or from a personal visit prior to moving to the community. By and large they
were not aware of any issues within the community which could negatively impact on their careers and they believed that through being a good communicator and competent teacher, they could influence the culture of the school.

At the end of the year five of the eleven participants viewed the community’s culture positively, while the remainder expressed negative observations. Negative comments included a class structure between landowners and workers; non-acceptance of females in authority; power conflicts; limited life experiences; and the community having “archaic” perceptions of education.

The teaching principals’ observations of school and community culture in eleven distinctive geographic areas supported Peterson’s (2002) assertion that, “there is no one best culture” (p 1). The literature addressing school culture points to it being the accumulation of individuals’ values, beliefs and practices and reflects the complex set of traditions and assumptions held by that community (Peterson, 2002; Richardson, 2001; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009). Simply put, it’s about, “the way we do things here” (Stewart, 2000, p 49).

In order to change the culture a beginning principal must first understand how the culture was shaped and how it impacts on community members (Williamson & Blackburn, 2009). While the culture can be influenced, it requires time, patience and the consensus of all those involved to do so (Richardson, 2001; Williamson & Blackburn, 2009). Sally successfully changed the cultural belief that the school was a babysitting service for children under school age and unemployed adolescents, which played a part in the students’ academic performances improving. Peterson (2002) would attribute this change to Sally’s assessing the culture and asking herself – “What aspects of the culture are negative and harmful and should be changed?” (p 5). Meanwhile, Jill, Eve and Ann experienced resistance to change. For Ann, it was as simple as wanting to move office furniture. This was consistent with Peterson and Deal’s (1998) suggestion that the culture of a community is influenced by even small details, from the way people dressed, to the way they accepted change and the way challenges were confronted. Similarly, Duncan and Seguin (2002) reported that the unobservable attributes of a school culture are just as powerful as the observable. They noted that a principal who does not listen to stakeholders about the beliefs or value systems in a school will not
influence the culture and added that it takes between five and ten years to change the school’s culture. Heather’s comments reflected this assertion when she stated that she wanted to remain at the school for three years, because the first year was a settling in period and the following years could be used to, “...change something for the better and know it will benefit everyone”.

In hindsight, the participants recommended that, prior to accepting the role, future applicants should research the area and discover as much as possible about its history and culture, as well as determining if they could live in a remote location without the trappings of an urban lifestyle. The value of completing a teaching practicum in rural and remote areas prior to appointment in those areas has been documented by several researchers (Halsey, 2005; Lock, 2008; Reid, 2011; Wildy & Clarke, 2008). Their research suggested that a rural and remote pre-service practicum placement permitted exposure to a wide range of opportunities, such as multi age teaching and indigenous and culturally diverse communities. Lock (2008) concluded that not only did it provide pre-service teachers with an introduction to teaching and living in rural areas, but it smoothed transition to those areas after qualifying as a teacher; while Reid (2011) advocated for pre-service training in order to understand the social patterns and history of the community and to be aware of the importance of local culture. Wildy and Clarke (2008) referred to the need to be “contextually literate” (p 736), that is, to understand the complexities of the community through training which included knowledge about how communities functioned and how school staff could work effectively within the community. Earlier research by McSwan (2000) indicated that students who were exposed to a rural and remote teaching practicum held more realistic expectations of what it was like to live in an isolated environment and were therefore more likely to apply for and be successful in, a rural teaching placement.

At the beginning of the year, although the participants possessed varying levels of experience and confidence in their teaching skills, they were conscious of the need to prove themselves as teachers in a small community. They believed that the teaching component of the role was the most important and they wanted to develop rapport with the students as a precursor to building positive relationships within the community. Therefore, those without multi age classroom experience, intended focusing on gaining
curriculum knowledge; the more experienced teachers intended focusing on the unfamiliar administrative tasks; while those who were experienced teachers and had principal experiences, sought to develop specific programmes for students, or to establish communication with stakeholders.

At the end of the year, five of the participants confessed that their teaching suffered at the expense of the administrative workload, while the remainder emphasised that although students and the curriculum remained their first priority, the administrative workload exceeded their expectations and required more time than anticipated. Despite concerns regarding lack of experience with multi age teaching at the beginning of the year, at its end those without experience made similar comments to other participants, signifying that the administrative workload demanded more of their attention than the classroom and added that being an experienced teacher was vital for a teaching principal. However, lack of training in multi age teaching has been identified as a stress trigger and a reason for abandoning teaching (Lester, 2003; Page, 2006; White, 2011). The need for multi age teaching experience was also raised by Clarke (2002a), who confirmed that few teaching principals were familiar with this form of teaching. Likewise, Lester (2001) found that only 30% of beginning teaching principals in rural and remote schools in Queensland were experienced in teaching multi age classes, despite this being standard teaching practice in small schools. Later, Lester (2003) reported that the teaching principals in her study emphasised the need to have a "solid understanding" (p 91) of the whole curriculum and that it was essential to be experienced in multi age teaching. She reported that those with no exposure to multi age teaching relied on previous principals or teaching colleagues to guide them through.

The stakeholders in this study agreed with these sentiments and emphasised the value they placed on classroom teaching over administrative duties. They asserted that teacher aide hours needed to be increased to provide additional classroom assistance and that the teaching principal needed to be an experienced teacher, with good behaviour management and classroom organisational strategies. These comments were consistent with those made by the Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia (ICPA) (2009) who campaigned for a re-assessment of the formulae for deciding administrative assistants’ and teacher aides’ working hours. In addition the ICPA recommended that
teaching principals have at least three years teaching experience, recency of practice and practical knowledge of working in small schools.

7.3.2 Personal and professional goals
At the end of the year the teaching principals were less satisfied with attaining their personal goals, than they were with meeting their professional goals. In particular, Jill, who expressed a desire at the beginning of the year, “To be seen as the principal of the school in a good way” and who valued teamwork, was disillusioned by the reaction of the staff and some community members. Likewise, Eve, who sought at the beginning of the year to have everyone celebrate an achievement and set her sights on progressing up the career ladder, moved to another town during the year and commuted to school. She later relinquished her role and planned on leaving education by the time she turned 40 years of age.

Meanwhile, Alice contended that she met her professional goal of improving the curriculum, but not her personal goal of remaining in the community for longer than the requisite three years. On the other hand, Natalie believed she met both her personal and professional goals. She enjoyed building relationships with the staff and community and she successfully applied for the substantive teaching principal role.

At the end of the year some stakeholders indicated they were satisfied with the teaching principal’s teaching abilities. Peggy and Kay mentioned Nan’s and Natalie’s abilities to build rapport with the students and Lois discussed Heidi’s work in raising the students’ results on the standardised tests. Mary and Fran regarded Alice’s and Iris’s behaviour management and classroom strategies, as their particular strengths and Mitchell regarded Nina’s teaching skills as “extraordinary”. However, both Peggy and Mary commented on the number of teaching principals with upper year level teaching experience and voiced their opinions that lower year level teachers needed to become teaching principals in one teacher schools, to provide a strong foundation for the students.
7.4 Administrative duties

At the beginning of the year the teaching principals acknowledged that the administrative workload would be time consuming and they would need to be resourceful time managers. They listed responding to emails and report writing as some of the predictable duties. Several noted a lack of understanding of the financial components of the role, as well as the systemic reports and computer programmes. They were hopeful that an experienced administrative assistant would guide them through the processes, or that district office would provide support. Furthermore, as teachers they were inexperienced in organising or managing staff and this responsibility was viewed cautiously.

At the end of the year each participant commented on the overwhelming workload for a teaching principal. However, whereas at the beginning of the year they expressed uncertainty about the systemic requirements of reporting and financial management, at the end of the year the reported difficulties were associated with understanding facility issues and the duality of the role. They made negative comparisons between their workload and that of non-teaching principals and the workload of the relatively newly created role of Head of Curriculum (HOC). The HOC was paid at the same level as a teaching principal, but only half their week was assigned to teaching, with the remainder designated to managing the curriculum. In comparison, the teaching principal received only one day each week, or in some cases, one day each fortnight off class, to manage the entire school. The perceived inequity between Bands 5 and 6 principals and non-teaching principals was that in addition to producing the same number of reports and attending meetings, as non-teaching principals, they were required to teach students and focus on improving academic results, but without the support of a deputy principal, or full time administrative assistant. Similar findings were reported from a study of small school principals in Scotland, where the increased administrative workload was cited as limiting the focus on core responsibilities of teaching and learning (Jones, 2006).

The findings from this research regarding the workload of teaching principals supported the outcomes from other studies, such as Lester (2003), who observed, “Principals of a small school have to balance management and leadership, but further to this is the
other full-time aspect of their work, teaching” (p 90). Lester reported that the principals in her study perceived they spent much of their time being reactive, rather than proactive, at a cost to their personal and professional goals. Likewise, studies by Clarke (2002, 2003, 2004), revealed a significant increase in teaching principals’ administrative workload over the past several years. In Clarke’s studies, teaching principals reported spending more than 40 hours per week completing administrative duties and rather than using their non-contact time for classroom preparation, worked on administrative tasks. Moreover, 20% spent twenty hours each week outside normal school hours working on curriculum and lesson planning and 85% spent between ten and thirty hours each week on administrative tasks. Accordingly, 90% of respondents in Clarke’s (2003) study complained that the allocated “Admin days” were inadequate for them to successfully complete their work. This study supported that contention, with participants indicating that their work days exceeded ten hours, as well as working several hours at weekends. They asserted that despite their intention to make teaching their priority during the year, the administrative workload had become all consuming. Those with no multi-age teaching experience expressed frustration that they spent more time completing administrative work than concentrating on how to teach across all year levels.

These comments mirrored participants in Lester’s (2001) research, where 27% of the beginning teaching principals were inexperienced in teaching multi-age classes and 43% boasted between one and three years experience. The participants in Lester’s research commented that strategies and knowledge of multi-age teaching would have made the transition easier and benefited the students. Meanwhile, the participants in this study highlighted the significance they attached to the teaching component of their role when they argued that they needed to be more familiar with the whole of school curriculum than non-teaching principals, as curriculum knowledge was the key ingredient to success in a small school. Similar comments were made earlier by Dimmock (1995) who noted that attention to teaching was diverted by the administrative workload and low-level clerical duties.

Other researchers have also identified the workload as an issue for teaching principals (Armstrong, 2002; Clarke & Stevens, 2009; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Ewington, Mulford, Kendall, Edmunds, Kendall and Silins, 2008; Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association,
2000; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Starr & White, 2008). Clarke has been prolific in his research into small school principals and has consistently pointed to the escalating workload characterised by increasing systemic demands and pressures imposed by curriculum reform (Clarke, 2002c). Similar stories were reported from country schools in Victoria, where Starr and White (2008) reported that the two major challenges facing small school principals were the workload proliferation and the escalating multiplicity of the role. Likewise, Ewington et al (2008) reported that the contextual demands placed on a teaching principal resulted in role conflict, brought about by needing to provide strong leadership; being responsible for decisions made by themselves and others; and being responsive to community needs within a framework of departmental priorities.

The anticipation of an experienced administrative assistant guiding them through the administrative labyrinth and district office support was reviewed at the end of the year with mixed reactions. For instance, Alice stated that Mary was “excellent”; and Iris rated Fran as “very capable”; but Eve expressed anger that despite being in the role for more than ten years, the administrative assistant was an incompetent “imbecile”, resulting in Eve performing more of the administrative work than expected. Similar observations were made about district office support. Some expressed satisfaction, while others claimed assistance was only provided when they were at, “breaking point”. Alice commented that her immediate supervisor, Executive Director (Schools), was not supportive when she needed to take sick leave; he conceded to parents’ insistence that she not attend professional development or meetings away from the school; and he refused her application for RAIS (Remote Area Incentive Scheme) days. RAIS days are additional emergent leave days for staff in remote areas who need to travel to access certain services not available at weekends, e.g specialist medical or dental appointments. Nan was also disappointed with her supervisor, whom she claimed stated he was not available to help solve problems and that she needed to resolve them alone. She claimed he told her that if she was not happy with that situation, she could “move on”. Likewise, Ann found that limited support was forthcoming from district office and suggested that an occasional telephone call to ensure she was managing would have helped her feel more comfortable. Several participants explained they were reluctant to ask for assistance because they feared it would reflect badly on their career prospects.
Recent studies have begun to emerge regarding the need to focus on support provided to principals by district office personnel (Barber, Whelan & Clark, 2010; Bottoms & Fry, 2008; Clarke & Wildy, 2011; Leithwood, 2010). Barber et al (2010) observed that, “...many principals cannot be successful without the best possible district leadership” (p 23). While Clarke and Wildy (2011) advocated the use of mentor principals to work in partnership with principals in clusters of schools and for district office personnel to be available either through visiting the school, or by maintaining telephone and email contact.

In this study the stakeholders were aware of the workload of the teaching principals, despite not being familiar with its content. The teachers believed too much time was spent on administrative work at the expense of student learning; the non teaching staff expressed concern that teaching principals came into the role without training in finance, preparing reports, or managing staff or the facilities; and the parents commented on the amount of time out of the school attending meetings or professional development. Some stakeholders expressed concern about the long working hours of the teaching principal and they were aware that much of the administrative work was completed after school or in the evenings and weekends, affording little personal time for relaxation.

### 7.5 Gender and Age

At the beginning of the year eight of the teaching principals stated that although they understood male leaders were traditionally preferred over females in rural and remote areas due to their sporting ability and disciplinarian skills, they did not believe that being female would negatively impact on acceptance into the community. Only Heather went into the community aware that the stakeholders requested a male teaching principal. Despite this knowledge, her apprehension was directed more toward her age than her gender.

Age was consistently raised as a potential inhibitor to acceptance at the beginning of the year, with 53% claiming age would have a greater impact than gender. The participants in the younger age group acknowledged that older staff and some parents could react
negatively to being directed by a young person with perceived limited life or teaching experience. The participants in the older age groups reasoned that they were less likely to encounter opposition and more likely to be respected for their experience. Although, as Alice pointed out, personality could play as much a part in acceptance as either gender or age. The issue of stakeholders perceiving age as equating to inexperience, has been raised in the literature and noted as a challenge, particularly for single females commencing their first year as a teaching principal (Clarke & Stevens, 2006). On the other hand, at the end of year interviews, only two participants mentioned age as being relevant to acceptance. For example, Nina expressed a vague notion that some community members considered her too young, although she was unable to provide concrete examples; and Heather was told a community member remarked she was too young and therefore too inexperienced for the role.

There was some correlation between age and satisfaction levels. Participants in the oldest age group, that is, 51-60 years tended to be more satisfied, while those in the 20-30 years group were less satisfied. It should be noted that those in the older age group were married and living in rural areas, while those in the younger age group were single and located in remote areas. These findings resonate with Clarke and Stevens (2006) who emphasised that younger females are more likely to apply for the principalship in small rural and remote schools, e.g. 60% of applicants for principalship in small schools in Western Australia in 2003 were female and 12% of those were younger than 30 years of age. However, the perception in the majority of small communities was that young females did not make effective school leaders and it was therefore inappropriate to appoint them into those communities (Clarke & Stevens, 2006).

An explanation for the increase in younger applicants for the role was tendered by Wilson, Powney, Hall and Davidson (2006), who stated that younger teachers were more likely to seek and gain promotion to a principalship than teachers over 44 years who were not interested in promotion, believing that they have “a shelf life” (p 245). Iris and Janice supported this observation when they reported that they were unlikely to gain promotion to larger schools, due to their ages.

At the end of the year each participant reported it was obvious that males were more highly valued than females as leaders in rural and remote areas. For instance, Nina
related the story of a male police officer who commented that although she had, “done my best”, in reference to a difficult situation, believed a male principal would have managed better. Likewise, although neither Alice nor Natalie was exposed first hand to disparaging gender comments, they were nonetheless cognisant of the respect with which males were treated and the tacit nuances of being female. In the same way, despite not personally being criticised for being females, Iris and Janice overheard gender related comments. In Iris’s community two male parents remarked that male teachers would be more appropriate to teach students with difficult behaviours and Janice overheard a comment regarding a preference for a male who would participate in physical outdoor activities with students. Whereas Jill observed that the community was so difficult she had formed the opinion, “Even a male would have had trouble”; and Ann noted that socially there was a distinction between her and her husband’s roles. He had taken a temporary job on one of the stations and was therefore seen as “one of the blokes” and she was “just his wife”. A participant in Michael’s (1996) study made a similar observation:

*When my husband came to stay a few days, I introduced him to the community at a school function. He was able to talk with the men about weather, crops and cattle prices. They saw things differently after that. (p 16)*

On the other hand, Nan, Heather and Eve were each personally subjected to situations which highlighted the perception of male authority in small communities. Heather and Eve expressed surprise that it was females, rather than males, who rejected them, but this was in keeping with other research findings. For instance, Grace (1994) claimed that rural women were sensitive to traditional roles being challenged or threatened; Sherman (2000) reported that one of the greatest challenges for a female principal was other females; and Giles (1995) found that females saw the role of school principal as conflicting with their concept of femininity. Meanwhile, Michael (1996) reported that women who resisted the tradition of male dominance, posed a threat to the community; and Cox (1996) suggested that due to the culture and values of the community, females were often “co-opted in being more assiduous gatekeepers for current masculine values than the male guardians themselves” (p. 115). Taking a broader industrial perspective, Ritchie and Piterman (2011) proposed the existence of an underlying anger directed at successful females from other females, “Women are really angry with other women and
they don’t like that female authority...basically women are criticising women” (p 23). Accordingly, in order to build relationships, female leaders in rural and remote communities have historically tended to work harder and make more sacrifices than males, who were more readily accepted (Kanjere, 2008).

At the end of the year, in a significant departure from the teaching principals’ perceptions, none of the stakeholders believed that gender played a part in acceptance. Nonetheless seven of the eight admitted that either the community or they personally, would have preferred a male in the role, but they agreed with Alice’s comment that he needed to fit the stereotypic mould of a male. Stakeholders indicated that they believed males were more authoritative, quick to sort out problems and better disciplinarians. These observations supported research that claimed leadership was viewed as more effective when it coincided with the community’s stereotypic view of leadership, which in Australia, tended to be of heroic, tough, taciturn and rugged males (Coleman et al, 1998; Sinclair, 1998).

Apart from some stakeholders’ positive comments regarding females’ organisational and decision making abilities, little mention was made of differences in communication styles between male and female leaders. This differed from other research which showed distinctive differences between the way males and females communicated. For instance, females used communication to avoid isolation, build effective interpersonal relationships and establish rapport and intimacy, whereas males sacrificed it in order to complete a task and as a means of maintaining the hierarchical structure (Rhode, 2002; Tannen, 1990). Furthermore, Shakeshaft (1995) argued that the language the genders used in communication indicated “power with” for females and “power over” for males (p 12).

As well as gender, marital status was seen to play a part in acceptance. For example, Nan asserted that a single female was the least desired choice as principal in a small community, with the preferred options being a married male, followed by a single male, or as third preference, a married female. Fran, one of the non teaching staff, agreed, claiming that the community wanted a married male teaching principal, particularly with children of his own, so he could relate to the community. This claim was further supported by Wildy and Clarke (2005) who noted that traditionally, married males with
young children were more likely to be welcomed and accepted into isolated areas than single females.

In both sets of interviews the teaching principals and stakeholders proposed that a lack of resistance to the principal’s gender was due to the previous teaching principal being female. However, Eve found staff were unco-operative due to the previous female principals treatment; and Ann was plagued by stories of the previous female principal’s “party animal” behaviour. Other researchers have challenged the belief of acceptance based on the previous principal’s gender, by claiming that the new incumbent needed to match the specific expectations of how a female principal should behave and if the new principal deviated from these expectations she would be deemed unsuitable (Brunner & Duncan, 1998; Duncan & Seguin, 2002).

### 7.6 Community and rural living

At the beginning of the year four of the twelve teaching principals acknowledged no previous small school experience. Two of the four were destined to spend the year working in remote areas and two in rural areas. At the end of the year, three of the four confessed they did not enjoy living in a remote area, while the fourth participant did not participate in the final interviews. Alice declared she managed the lifestyle while she was involved in a live-in relationship, but when that relationship broke down she found the remoteness, intensified by the lack of a township, difficult to tolerate. The remaining two participants who expressed dissatisfaction, Nina and Heather, cited their reasons as not having a partner, or close friends nearby, no access to coffee shops and for Heather, a belief she was being observed by the community who commented when she spent the weekend away.

A sense of personal and professional isolation was also reported by first year principals in Western Australia (Wildy & Clarke, 2008). Commenting on the sense of professional isolation without adequate guidance and the personal isolation of leaving behind a network of friends and family, one of the principals in Wildy and Clarke’s study observed, “You are on your own” (p 734). Another first year principal commented that despite being invited to join groups there was, “...no time for commitments outside of
teaching” (p 735), which added to the sense of isolation. Moreover, geographic isolation, distance from family and inadequate shopping were among the reasons for high turnover of school staff and impacted on their wellbeing (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Huysman, 2008; McClure, Redfield & Hammer, 2003; O’Brien, Goodard & Keeffe, 2007; Roberts, 2004; Sharplin, 2002; Starr & White, 2008).

Overall, five of the eleven teaching principals declared at the end of year interviews that they had not enjoyed living in a rural or remote area. Four of the five had been assigned to remote areas, and four of the five were unmarried. In addition to Alice, Nina and Heather the remaining two participants to express dissatisfaction were Ann and Eve. In the interviews at the beginning of the year, Ann and Eve were guarded in their comments about living in a small community. Although Ann was cautiously optimistic and looking forward to, “an adventure”, Eve was wary about the lack of privacy afforded in small towns. At the end of the year Eve’s comments were supported by her experiences. She noted that community members drove past her house and commented on its maintenance; she was disturbed by power failures which resulted in water pumps not working; and she disliked cane toads and snakes around the house. In their study of beginning principals in small rural schools, Duncan and Seguin (2002) made similar observations regarding lack of privacy, “It is evident that in a small community, anonymity is difficult to preserve and suspicions and misunderstandings arise easily” (p 613).

Meanwhile, Ann’s initial attempted optimistic outlook was not maintained during the year. She commented on the small size of the community and its lack of interest or craft groups; the “party culture” which existed between long term community members; the difficulty attached to initiating social conversations; as well as the invasion of privacy by community members. In addition, Ann was particularly incensed by the inadequate living accommodation, describing it as a “donga” with limited space and no drinking water. Other researchers have identified inadequate accommodation as the cause for dissatisfaction by rural and remote staff in small schools (Hudson & Hudson, 2008; McClure et al, 2003; Michael, 1996; Mills & Gale, 2003). Following her investigation
into issues faced by female principals in rural and remote areas Michael (1996) concluded:

Suitable accommodation was found to be a major factor in retaining and attracting both principals and teaching staff. If the department is keen to attract and retain women in less favourable locations in Queensland, the quality and safety of accommodation need to be improved. (p 21)

For those who enjoyed living and working in a rural or remote community the reasons were varied. They ranged from Sally’s preference for no traffic lights, to Natalie’s simply enjoying the country lifestyle, through to Jill and Janice having taught in more isolated areas. Iris and Jill commented that being close to a regional centre, or large town, was an added benefit as it afforded opportunities to spend time away from the small school community. In addition, Jill believed that having a partner alleviated the sense of isolation and provided someone with whom to talk over issues.

Three of the five participants who expressed dissatisfaction with the rural and remote lifestyle at the end of the year were cautious in their comments at the beginning of the year. However, the six participants who, at the end of the year, were satisfied with the small community lifestyle expressed an expectation at the beginning of the year that they would do so. Those six had previously lived in a small community, five having taught in small schools and Nan having been a governess on a remote property. Three of the six were in remote areas and were not married.

Several stakeholders argued that acceptance into small school communities was aided by not mocking the lifestyle, inviting the community into the school for social functions and by being involved in local activities, not just school functions. Other recommendations included not making friends with only some community members, not partying, or being publicly drunk and being cautious in conversations. Huysman (2008) concluded that because the teaching principal cannot leave her job at work, but must socialise and interact with colleagues and the community, there exists, “...a complex dance of perceptions and realities, long standing animosities and alliances” (p 34).

At the end of the year the stakeholders reflected on the way the teaching principal interacted with the community. For instance, although Heather had not been the
community’s first choice for principal, her communication and positive attitude had won them over; while Natalie also developed good relationships in the community through her communication, participation and by not leaving the community at weekends. Likewise, Iris had been accepted due to her remaining in the community at weekends and she and her husband working at functions organized by the community. Mills and Gale (2003) made similar observations following their research into transient teachers in rural areas of Australia and concluded that communities expressed a desire “…for staff who want to get involved with the town and make the town their home” (p 148). Meanwhile, Mary reported that although Alice attempted to involve the community by organizing special days at the school, she tended to be abrupt with parents when discussing their children and it was obvious that she felt isolated and lonely. Likewise, Nan had not been accepted by the community, despite being pleasant and polite, as she made no effort to integrate into the community. Nan’s non-acceptance was similar to Wildy’s (2004) report of Western Australian beginning principals who were not accepted by stakeholders because they did not participate in local activities. Several other researchers have emphasised the need for female small school principals to immerse themselves in local activities in order to be accepted, despite males not being required to do so (Bjork, 2000; Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Kanjere, 2008; Wallin & Sackney, 2003).

One of the parent stakeholders in this study recommended that Education Queensland prepare a package of information for beginning teaching principals to help them integrate into small communities and that they make it clear to the community that they valued and supported the teaching principal. An emerging body of literature supports the contention that district offices need to provide greater support to principals in small rural and remote schools (Barber et al, 2010; Clarke & Wildy, 2011; Hertting, 2008; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton & Newton, 2010).

At the same time, White (2011) advocated that potential rural and remote school staff be better trained in “understanding rurality” (p 4). That is, the geographic, demographic and economic aspects of living in a rural community. She argued that before assuming the role, they undertake study to understand the expectations within specific rural school contexts and subsequently, how to live within the community. Clarke and Wildy (2011)
added that while on-the-job training was crucial, it needed to be, “...complemented by systematic and specific preparation for the role before appointment” (p 33). They supported White’s (2011) assertion that more specific leadership development programmes be provided to aspiring principals, prior to appointment.

To more fully understand the characteristics of the participants who rated themselves as either satisfied or dissatisfied with living in rural or remote communities, Table 7.1 details the location, age and marital status of the teaching principals, along with their previous small school experience.

Table 7.1 Characteristics of satisfied and dissatisfied teaching principals living in rural or remote school communities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Other small school experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x Remote</td>
<td>2 x 20-30 years</td>
<td>3 x Single</td>
<td>6 x Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x Rural</td>
<td>1 x 31-40 years</td>
<td>3 x Married</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 x 51-60 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 x Remote</td>
<td>3 x 20-30 years</td>
<td>4 x Single</td>
<td>2 x Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 x Rural</td>
<td>1 x 31-40 years</td>
<td>1 x Married</td>
<td>3 x No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 x 41-50 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.7 Expectations

7.7.1 Community expectations

At the beginning of the year the teaching principals assumed that the community’s primary expectation would relate to the students’ progress and being happy at school. There was some disquiet regarding previous communities’ expectations that were too high and wanting excessive input into the school and its operation. Plus, there were individual concerns about community relationships with the previous principal and the community expecting them to be leaders, but with opposition to their gender in leadership roles. There was no mention of district office expectations, but rather their expectation that district office would provide them with support and training.
At the end of the year the participants identified three sets of stakeholder expectations - the community, the staff and district office. Those who submitted reports and paperwork on time believed they met the expectations of district office, while others believed they met the parents’ expectations by improving the students’ academic performance, but did not meet district office’s timelines for paperwork submission. None of the participants was able to state that they met the expectations of all three sets of stakeholders and in some cases were not confident as to the level of their success. For example, Alice claimed that although she met the timelines for district office she was uncertain if she did so to their standard; and Nan believed she met the parents’ expectations by improving the students’ academic results, but did not meet their expectations of socially interacting within the community. Furthermore, Nan’s initial expectation that the stakeholders would have input into the school did not eventuate. In fact, she discovered the P&C was inactive and presented as disinterested in the school’s operation. Likewise, Eve initially believed the community would welcome her fresh approach, her sharing information and willingness to negotiate her role. She found instead that the P&C were not receptive to the changes she wished to implement and rather than accepting her leadership, worked against her decisions. While Nina, who expected the stakeholders to have a high level of input into the school’s operation, was surprised to find that their input was not in the areas she expected, but in peripheral issues. These factors all contributed to a general feeling of dissatisfaction. In an analysis of work dissatisfaction for rural teaching staff Huysman (2008) argued that dissatisfaction was often the result of unrealistic expectations placed on them from peers, the employer, community members and themselves, which was exacerbated by the inconsistencies between their professional role and their social role.

Some beginning of the year expectations soured quickly. For instance, Sally initially believed the community valued education, but quickly discovered they perceived the school as a babysitting service, with under age children and older teenagers attending haphazardly and rather than enquiring about their children’s academic progress, were more interested in the lunch provided by the school. Ann believed she met some expectations, but nevertheless felt unwelcome and unaccepted in the community; Janice admitted that at the end of the year she was still unsure what the community expectations were of her; and Iris believed the reaction would be different based on
which cohort’s expectations were questioned. She did not meet district office
expectations as she failed to complete systemic documents on time, but believed most
staff and the community would perceive she met their expectations around student
progress and behaviour.

Meanwhile, Heather determined from the SOS data that she did not meet staff
expectations and she was therefore determined to change her style in her second year at
the school. It is worth noting that she successfully accomplished her goal. In Heather’s
second year in the school all areas assessed by the SOS were above the state mean.
Natalie and Jill also referred to the SOS results. Despite Natalie’s uncertainty as to
whether she met staff or parents’ expectations, the SOS highlighted an upward trend in
all areas. Whereas Jill drew attention to the Morale and Relationships areas, which
indicated that both staff and parents were dissatisfied. Because Jill was removed from
the school at the end of her first year while an investigation took place, she was unable
to set goals to change their perceptions. Unfortunately, no stakeholders from Jill’s
school participated in this study and therefore their interpretation of Jill’s leadership
was not available. Other research has indicated that stakeholders were dissatisfied with
the principal when she failed to listen to them, talked too much, asked for information
but failed to use it, did not value others’ opinions and consistently referred to how
things were done at her previous school (Duncan & Seguin, 2002). It is not known
whether Jill was viewed in the same manner.

The differences in expectations across the two interview time frames indicated that the
teaching principals were unprepared for the expectations stakeholders held for them.
Based on their research, Walker et al, (2003) came to a similar conclusion, suggesting
that dealing with difficult parents and solving conflict situations were unexpected tasks
for beginning principals of all school levels. Walker et al concluded that insufficient
preparation was given to beginning principals, especially those commencing their
careers in rural schools, where they were required to deal with teaching, administration
and the community, after training only in teaching. Other research into rural
communities pointed to a loss of anonymity and an expectation that the teaching
principal would reside in the town and participate in its activities (Mills & Gale, 2003).
Principals in Mills and Gale’s research reported that these factors, coupled with
harassment from the community, drove them away. Eve’s decision to leave the area and commute from a nearby town and Ann’s acknowledgement that the community observed and commented on her washing was consistent with these findings. Furthermore, Lester (2003) reported from her research into the dilemmas and tensions faced by teaching principals, that they worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week and that the authorities needed to know, “how the community expectations influenced their work and how delicate the balances were” (p 88).

Meanwhile, from a gender perspective, research has suggested that one of the greatest challenges facing female principals was meeting the higher expectations placed on them than those placed on their male counterparts, with less allowance made for female error (Smith & Hale, 2002; Tallerico, 2000).

### 7.7.2 Expectations of self

At the beginning of the year the participants wanted to present themselves positively and confirm their own expectations that they were experienced and competent teachers, through improving student outcomes. To a lesser extent they wanted to develop their leadership skills in order to advance their careers. They held expectations of completing the two or three years required in the community and in some cases of continuing beyond the obligatory time.

At the end of the year most of the participants noted that they met some of their own expectations, particularly those who simply wanted to, “survive”, but the major satisfaction came from student outcomes and curriculum programmes they introduced. Iris summed up their comments when she stated that although she did not perceive progress during the year, upon reflection at its end, realised she met her expectations regarding student outcomes.

The stated expectation at the beginning of the year of completing the required period as a teaching principal in the community, or even extending beyond that time, was met by few participants. Appendix E will provide greater detail in relation to the careers of the teaching principals following their first year in a rural and remote community, but briefly, only Natalie expressed a willingness to remain in the community at the end of the first year. Nina did not apply for the substantive position and at the end of the year
returned to a different role in a school in the south east of the state; Alice began seeking relocation to a school in the south east at the end of her first year; Heather and Ann were advised by their district offices that they needed to complete a second year before applying for relocation; Nan and Eve relinquished their principal positions and were transferred into other roles in different communities; Janice and Iris remained at their schools as they believed they would not receive promotions due to their ages and were therefore considering retirement; Sally agreed to complete a second year but was keen to leave; and Jill was removed from the school while an investigation into complaints made against her were conducted.

Those who claimed to have not met their own expectations spoke about feeling disappointed with the negative or hostile staff and community and not being permitted to demonstrate their leadership. The disappointment for Eve was in not being able to use the leadership style she believed was effective and reverting instead to an autocratic style in order to survive. The participants agreed that overall they needed to work hard to meet the expectations of stakeholders and themselves, although as Alice stated, the expectations she set for herself were quite high. Each participant added an area, such as self confidence, communication, or building relationships, they intended developing during the coming year.

7.8 **Personal factors**

Some personal qualities suggested as necessary for a teaching principal during the first interview, were not included in the second. Qualities of patience, diplomacy, punctuality, empathy and dedication were replaced in the second interview with the need for resilience, dependability, positivity and a commitment to the school community. There was also a greater awareness in the second interview that a leader needed advanced “people skills” and the ability to set boundaries between work and personal time, although as was later attested, this did not necessarily occur during the first semester. At the beginning of the year other characteristics such as being confident, energetic, honest, approachable, friendly and patient were identified, along with having a sense of humour and demonstrating an interest in the community and the students outside school hours. Some questioned whether they would be, “good enough” to
accomplish all that was required and of not knowing, “How things are done”. Several participants admitted at the end of the year that they were less confident of their ability to lead than they were at the beginning of the year and were less certain of the criteria for leadership. Sally and Heather confessed they had been surprised by the level of confidence required in the role, while Eve and Jill argued that the community had not permitted them to be leaders.

Many of these comments were consistent with earlier research which pointed towards the importance of personal resilience for principals and the potential loss of confidence as a result of the competing pressures and challenges of the role (Clarke, Wildy and Pepper, 2007; Wildy and Clarke, 2008). Other researchers referred to principals requiring human leadership attributes, encompassing interpersonal skills and relationship development (J. Watterston, 2008); persistence; a sense of humour; being compassionate, but tough; and a good listener (Drysdale et al, 2009); and being emotionally intelligent and trustworthy, with highly developed public relations skills (Hausman et al, 2000).

At the beginning of the year, the teaching principals raised issues of isolation, homesickness, being away from a social support network and dealing with stress as factors which could impact on how successfully they managed the role. At the end of the year, these factors were again raised. Isolation figured as a key to dissatisfaction, particularly for the younger participants such as Nina and Alice, who missed the companionship of friends and the ability to frequent a coffee shop or other entertainment. Other participants reported that due to the workload, they were initially stressed by spending too much time on school work at weekends and in the evenings. It was not until the second half of the year that they implemented stress reducing strategies, thereby creating their personal space.

At the end of the year several of the participants commented on the unexpected stress from working with parents and some staff and their inability to separate their personal feelings from professional events. For instance, Janice reported that a parent swore at her and blamed her for an incident outside school hours; Iris was distressed when parents removed a student from her school; Nina and Ann experienced difficulties when they attempted to arrange a school camp; and Eve was condemned for her management
of a child abuse situation. Meanwhile Jill, who at the beginning of the year did not expect exposure to stress, was subjected to ongoing intimidation from staff which led to her removal from the school, thereby heightening her stress levels.

7.9 Chapter summary
This chapter explored the similarities and differences between the comments made during the two sets of interviews and between the two cohorts of participants. It addressed the seven identified themes, namely, leadership; school and teaching; administrative duties; gender and age; community and rural living; expectations; and personal factors.

In addressing leadership skills, both cohorts consistently raised communication as a pre-requisite for successful leadership. Communication was particularly emphasised at the end of the year, when the stakeholders identified those teaching principals they believed demonstrated effective communication and thus effective leadership and those who did not.

The teaching principals’ workload was identified as an obstacle to leadership and job satisfaction, by both the teaching principals and the stakeholders. The range of duties was unfavourably compared to that of non-teaching principals and the newly created HOC position. Consequently, the teaching principals discussed the inadequate time allowed to complete the administrative tasks and the training required to undertake the role and highlighted the need for training to be contextually specific. At the same time, the stakeholders raised their concerns about time spent away from the school attending training. In keeping with the literature regarding training, the teaching principals raised the value of having an experienced teaching principal mentor them through their first year.

There was general acknowledgement from both teaching principals and stakeholders that male principals were viewed more positively in rural and remote schools than females and that married males with a family were their first preference and single
females, their least preferred, regardless of experience. Some of the females in this study were subjected to overtly biased displays of preference, while others were cognisant of implied predilection toward males.

Compounding the gender issue was a sense of personal and professional isolation that came from residing in a rural and remote area without the amenities associated with regional and urban living. Accordingly, the younger, unmarried female teaching principals were more inclined to feel isolated. At the end of the year the stakeholders pinpointed the teaching principals who participated in the community and those who distanced themselves and highlighted the significance they attached to participation.

During the year one of the personal findings for the teaching principals was the need to be confident and assertive. They remarked that they did not expect the role to demand so much of their personal energy and as a result, some questioned whether being a teaching principal was the path they would pursue. The career paths of the eleven female beginning teaching principals who participated in the final interviews in this research are outlined in Appendix E.

The following chapter draws the findings together to addresses how this study met its aims. It will also consider the practical implications of the findings for the practice of future female teaching principals; will discuss the contributions this study made to leadership knowledge and literature; as well as the limitations of the research; and finally, discuss the implications of the findings for future research into small school leadership.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

The focus of this study was on the leadership experiences of female beginning teaching principals within rural and remote small school communities, with a view to identifying specific elements that contribute to successful female leadership in small school communities. The previous two chapters presented and discussed the teaching principals’ and stakeholders’ perceptions at the beginning of the year and at its end, in relation to the seven themes identified in Chapter 5 of this dissertation. Those themes were, leadership; school and teaching; administrative duties; gender and age; community and rural living; expectations; and personal factors.

This chapter will review the initial aims of the study and address how it met those aims. It will then proceed to discuss the practical implications that emerged from this study in relation to females commencing their careers as teaching principals; discuss the contributions the study makes to leadership knowledge and literature; acknowledge the limitations of the study; and finally, discuss the implications for future research into the complex nature of being a female beginning teaching principal in rural and remote small school communities.

8.2 Review of the research aims

8.2.1 Aim one:

To understand the perceptions of beginning female teaching principals about their role as leader within the school and broader small school community at the commencement of their first year and to determine if those perceptions changed during the year.

At the commencement of the year the teaching principals listed generic skills such as communication, time management and organisational skills as paramount for a leader. Other qualities were individually raised, such as having patience and a sense of humour;
and being energetic, but “delicate” when dealing with stakeholders. As teaching principals, they were aware they needed exceptional teaching skills, but needed to balance those skills with an anticipated demanding administrative workload, in which their abilities were limited.

Many of the comments regarding leadership were influenced by previous experience either as an acting teaching principal, or as an acting deputy principal for a short period and indicated that as confronting as the workload was, their earlier acting opportunities assisted their understanding. These comments were consistent with earlier research, which confirmed that significant work experience in leadership roles permitted the aspiring leader to manage the workload and to effectively communicate with stakeholders (Groves, 2005). The teaching principals agreed with Groves’ recommendation that organisations needed to improve principals’ pre-leadership skills.

At the end of year interviews some teaching principals revealed that their perceptions of leadership changed during the year to include broader personal skills of confidence and assertiveness and confessed they were surprised by the level required. These comments reflected findings from earlier research, which argued that building self confidence was more important in the development of effective principals, than learning technical skills (Daresh & Playko, 1994). Similarly, humanistic skills, such as the ability to communicate and relate to school stakeholders, was valued above technical skills by teachers and principals with more than five years experience (Brewster & Klump, 2005; Daresh & Arrowsmith, 2003; Mulford & Johns, 2004).

At the beginning of the year, the teaching principals were not prepared for the impact the community would exert on their experiences and the strain it placed on their leadership styles. For example, at the beginning of the year Eve perceived that she would be criticised, but at the same time, the stakeholders would welcome her fresh approach. Instead, her leadership was rejected and she subsequently moved out of the community and commuted to work each day. Similarly, Jill perceived that her leadership skills could be extended by integrating into the school team and encouraging others to participate. In spite of her eagerness to meld with the team, during the year her experiences were fraught with exclusions and interpersonal conflict with staff and community members. Meanwhile, Janice discovered that her perception of a leader
modelling appropriate behaviour did not produce the desired results; and Sally’s aim to be “easy going” as a leader proved ineffective and she needed to “put my foot down”. These findings, relating to interpersonal relationships and community involvement, were consistent with the views of Mallia (1992) who, twenty years earlier, reported that beginning principals in Victoria were also unprepared for the difficulties associated with building relationships with staff and community members, or the involvement of parents in small schools. The findings also supported the more recent observations of Garcia-Garduno et al (2011) who noted that the primary obstacle for beginning principals was building interpersonal relationships.

Some teaching principals believed that the change in their leadership style was relevant only to that particular community, while others acknowledged becoming more aware of the effect of their leadership on stakeholders. Meanwhile, Heather, for example, realised she needed to make more long lasting changes. This realisation fitted with the work of O’Mahony and Matthews (2003), who argued that beginning principals were faced with a series of firsts, all at the same time, with little or no training and with Alvy and Robbins (2005) findings in which they noted, “One of the difficulties that new principals face is that they must lead while they are learning to lead” (p 50).

Overwhelmingly, at the end of the year the teaching principals voiced frustration that their leadership was hindered by the high administrative workload and the limited time they were released from class to attend to those duties. Similar frustrations regarding the impact of the administrative workload; lack of clerical assistance; the complexity of the role; and increased responsibilities taking them away from their core business of working with students and developing their potential leadership skills, were expressed in earlier studies (Armstrong, 2002; Clarke, 2002 & 2003; Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Lester, 2001 & 2003; Mallia, 1992; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Starr & White, 2008; Thomas & Hornsey, 1991; Wilson, 2009). As in those studies, the teaching principals drew attention to the additional duties of a teaching principal, such as fixing water pumps, participating in local activities and completing additional administrative work without a full time administrative assistant (Armstrong, 2002; Clarke & Stevens, 2006). They did not perceive those skills as constituting leadership, but rather as mundane
chores that nobody else would complete and which, at the same time, hampered their leadership activities.

At the beginning of the year the teaching principals expected a heavy, but manageable workload. However, at the end of the year they unfavourably compared it to the duties of the Head of Curriculum (HOC) in large schools, who was paid at the same rate as teaching principals, but was released from class more frequently and did not perform administrative duties. One of the significant findings to come out of this research was the unfavourable comparison between the role of teaching principal and HOC. The HOC was a newly created role at the beginning of this research, but other studies have not drawn comparisons between the roles. The significance of this finding should not be overlooked because, as was evident over the ensuing five years, the HOC role was viewed by some teaching principals to facilitate their progress more substantially into higher band schools and into leadership.

In summary, the interviews at the end of the year demonstrated that being a successful teaching principal involved more than acquiring a standard list of discrete skills. Although some participants did not change their perceptions of leadership during the year, they admitted that the role required more work than anticipated and the workload was overwhelming. Others confessed to feeling frustrated and disillusioned by the staff and community reaction to their leadership and questioned their suitability for the role.

The findings from this study supported earlier research into practitioners’ perceptions of leadership and workload for beginning teaching principals (Armstrong, 2002; Clarke, 2003; Howley & Pendarvis, 2002; Lester, 2001 & 2003; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Starr & White, 2008; Wilson, 2009; Wilson & McPake, 1998). However, it deviated from other studies by finding that the role of HOC was viewed as being less demanding than a teaching principal’s role and a more enticing career path towards school leadership.
8.2.2 **Aim two:**

*To identify the expectations other school staff and the school community hold for the principal as leader of the school and to determine the extent to which the current teaching principal met those expectations during her first year.*

The expectations the stakeholders held for the teaching principal included the ability to communicate with the community, to have excellent teaching skills, and the capacity to build relationships within the community. In addition, she was expected to demonstrate strong leadership skills, be well organised and able to adequately deal with the administrative component of the role.

As Dempster (2001) reported, school stakeholder cohorts held their own distinctive expectations of the principal. Similarly, in this study the school staff counted on the principal being assertive with parents; clearly communicating her expectations of staff; holding regular staff meetings; being consultative; listening to them; and being honest and patient, while at the same time separating her personal life from her work life. More specifically, the administration staff expected her to be familiar with the administrative requirements of her role, while the teaching staff wanted her to be aware of the whole of school curriculum; to be a disciplinarian; and be a good teacher. Meanwhile, the community expected her to participate in local events such as rodeos and horse drafts; have the ability to discuss a variety of topics other than school, but remain professional and confidential; ensure students achieved academically; and not to favour some families over others. Most of all, none of the stakeholders wanted a new teaching principal to introduce change too quickly, or to criticise the processes within the school. Similar skills, including communication, developing interpersonal relationships, motivating staff, setting goals, providing a collaborative school culture and creating an effective learning environment, have been listed as essential for an effective principal in other research (Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Dempster, 2001; Gilley et al, 2009; Kruger, 2009; Leithwood et al, 2008; Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010; Notman et al, 2008; J. Watterston, 2008).

Findings from this study also supported previous research which indicated that school stakeholders’ reactions to principals tended to be based on their stereotypic expectations of gender (Eagly et al, 2000). Subsequently, those expectations of how female
principals should perform in the role impacted on their acceptance and subsequent success (Wildy, 2004; Wilkinson, 2002). This finding reflected Butler’s (1990) theory of gender performitivity and her assertion that gender is constructed through social interactions and roles are constrained by society’s norms. In other words, a female may be perceived as unsuitable if she performs outside the expectation of how a female should behave (Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Forsyth et al, 1997). In this instance, the role of principal fitted within the socially constructed expectation that only males can perform effectively as school principal (Guba, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Despite some stakeholders not making explicit comments regarding gender, the teaching principals were aware of the implicit expectation that principals should be males. For example, even Natalie, who was not exposed to explicit gender references, queried whether her school based decisions would have been more readily accepted had they been made by a male. Similar observations came from Sherman (2000), who claimed that stakeholders often used non-verbal communication to express their lack of agreement.

At the end of the year the stakeholders identified those teaching principals who did, or did not, meet their expectations. For instance, several school staff remarked on the teaching skills of the teaching principal and on their ability to discipline the students, while at the same time building relationships with them. Others were concerned about the lack of communication and not sharing information with staff, while Linda noted that despite being friendly and polite, Nan did not participate in community activities and consequently was not accepted by the community. This finding was consistent with findings from Wildy’s (2004) research which suggested the teaching principal’s willingness to immerse him/herself in local activities influenced the community’s acceptance.

Unarguably, the principal is expected to connect with stakeholders and work with them in a team approach, melding with the team so that formal leadership is not evident (Sergiovanni, 1996). However, at least one teaching principal in this study, Jill, reported that despite her best efforts and her claim to value team work above all else, she was ostracised from working with the staff and felt excluded from them. She recalled an incident when the staff ordered a take-away meal for a meeting, but did not include food
for her; and on another occasion they wore costumes to a school event, but did not advise or include her. Unfortunately, no stakeholders from Jill’s school participated in this study and it would be unwise to conjecture the reasons for her exclusion.

However, Jill’s case raised questions as to which stakeholder expectations she failed to meet. Age and experience should not have been issues, as she was in the older age group and she was experienced, both as a teacher and as a principal in a smaller school. It therefore posed uncertainty around issues raised in other research, such as participation in community events equating to acceptance (Wildy, 2004) or of flaunting her power as principal (Wilkinson, 2002). The answer may also lie in Butler’s (1990) theory of gendered performance. As the school staff was exclusively female, did they seek to subjugate the female teaching principal into a stereotypical subservient role? Other researchers have observed that females are less likely to support a female in authority than they are a male (Celikten, 2005; D’Arcy, 1995; Grace, 1994; Moreau et al, 2005; Sherman, 2000; Sinclair, 1998; Smith & Hale, 2002; Warren, 2009). Butler (1990) advocated for gender roles to be deconstructed, making it possible for change to occur in cultural expectations, which would in turn, result in females being accepted as leaders as easily as males.

In summary, the school stakeholders held a broad range of expectations for the teaching principal, from personal characteristics of honesty and compassion, through to professional skills of teaching and administrative knowledge. At the end of the year, most of the stakeholders were able to report that while the teaching principal may have lacked a skill in one area, she made up for it in another. The findings from this study confirmed earlier research that indicated high expectations including communication, respect, support and leadership were required in order for a principal to be deemed effective (Bogler, 2001; Butt & Retallick, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Dempster, 2001; Hill & Lineback, 2011; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Furthermore, the findings reflected comments that beginning teaching principals are insufficiently trained for the administrative aspects of the role (Graham et al, 2009).

While the findings from this study are compatible with those found in the studies mentioned previously, particularly those of Dempster (2001), who sought stakeholder feedback regarding teaching principals, this study was unique in that it specifically
targeted the expectations held for female teaching principals in rural and remote communities. In keeping with Butler’s (1990) argument that constraints are placed on individuals through society’s norms of what is acceptable for each gender, the findings from this study indicated that the performance, or “doing” of gender, continues in rural and remote communities. This finding has not previously been forthcoming from other research.

8.2.3 **Aim three:**

*To establish the way in which the leadership experiences of a female beginning teaching principal are influenced by the social complexities of living in a rural and remote community.*

As noted earlier, the geographic nature of Queensland has led to a proliferation of small rural and remote schools in isolated communities, each with its own unique culture, traditions and way of life. Therefore, based on a combination of geographic, professional, personal and social isolation, those schools have witnessed a greater turnover of principals than schools in urban areas (Lester, 2001; Tomlinson, 1994; Whittall, 2001). Fundamental factors which contribute to the difficulty of attracting and retaining principals include the cost of travel, lack of contact with family and friends, a lower standard of accommodation and the increased cost of living, as well as the absence of peer support, mentoring and difficulties in accessing professional development (Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Lester, 2001 & 2003; Michael, 1996; O’Mahony and Matthews, 2003; Wallin & Sackney, 2003).

These issues are exacerbated when it is understood that principal applicants for rural and remote schools tend to have limited classroom and life experiences, or administrative training (Howley et al, 2002; Lester, 2001; O’Mahony, 2003). These factors are highlighted still further by the lack of access to social services in some rural and remote areas where the principal is often called on to manage fragile social relationships, such as abuse and family breakdowns. Jones (2006) made the point that, in Scotland, principals required training in managing those situations, so as not to damage school-community relationships. One of the teaching principals in this study, Eve, agreed. Eve found herself embroiled in a sensitive family matter involving abuse,
which she was required by law to report, but the community reacted negatively to her following legal and departmental guidelines to manage the situation.

The issues female educational leaders face must be carefully understood in each specific context in which they are lived. The teaching principals in this study were able to articulate the social constructions that impacted on every aspect of their lives. For instance, one of the reasons Ann gave for her dissatisfaction was the lack of privacy and constantly being “on show”. She felt she was being judged and that community members were gossiping about her. Ann’s perceptions were similar to those of Wallin and Sackney (2003) who drew attention to the lack of anonymity in rural communities and to O’Mahony and Matthews (2003) who referred to beginning principals as “living in a goldfish bowl” (p 12). However, Ann’s situation was frustrated further by the poor quality housing she was assigned with insufficient space for two adults and which she described as a “donga.” Without space for her sewing machine, or for her husband to store his tools, their access to stress relieving activities was restricted. An additional factor was the absence of drinking water in the house, which necessitated carrying containers of water from the school. Ann perceived the failure by the department to prioritise this need as critical, as a further frustration. She stated that her overall leadership experience and socialisation would have been enhanced by improved accommodation, “...the more remote you are, the better the accommodation should be, so we can concentrate on other stuff”. Ann’s dissatisfaction mirrored findings by other researchers, who found that in addition to the isolation and lack of acceptance, poor accommodation was a leading factor in female principals relinquishing the role of principal (Hudson & Hudson, 2008; McClure et al, 2003; Michael, 1996; Mills & Gale, 2003).

Meanwhile, the younger teaching principals noted that a lack of social outlets and urban entertainment, such as movie theatres and coffee shops, reduced the ability to enjoy their experiences. Social activities were restricted to the immediate community, leading Heather to state that despite not being a social person, she attended functions, “...because that’s what communities want”, but did not enjoy mixing socially with students or their parents; while Alice described her reaction to the social environment simply as, “I feel it’s a life sentence”. Likewise, Nan, despite having previously lived in
an isolated environment, admitted that she deliberately chose not to build social networks in the community, seeking instead to maintain a professional distance, thereby creating a barrier with community members. The barrier Nan erected was also evidenced in the behaviour of two principals in Wildy’s (2004) study in Western Australia. Wildy acknowledged that although rural and remote communities demonstrated a propensity toward male principals, acceptance was substantially influenced by the individual’s willingness to participate in local activities and to commit to the community’s culture. Neither the two principals in Wildy’s study, nor Nan, were rated as successful by the school stakeholders. Conversely, others such as Natalie and Sally, also with past experiences in rural and remote areas, but who enjoyed socially interacting with community members, were accepted and regarded as successful.

Other researchers have also referred to the need for a successful principal to adapt to the social environment in order to be more compatible with it; to know which issues were negotiable; and to meet the needs of a foreign social network without experiencing isolation and burn out (Coleman, 1998; Hausman et al, 2000; Mills & Gale, 2003; Sternberg, 1998). At the same time, given the substantial gains for their community if strategies can be found for retaining female teaching principals, it is also up to the community to encourage and support their social acceptance (Herrington & Herrington, 2001). However if, as some researchers have argued, female principals are rejected because they do not meet the perceived male characteristics of aggression and confrontation equated with leadership, Butler (1990) would challenge the leaders to become more fluid and move between masculine and feminine styles of leadership (Giles, 1995; Michael, 1996; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Sherman, 2000). Butler argued that by behaving according to early gender indoctrination and expectations, individuals maintained the gender stereotypes, “The very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes” (1990, p 145).

While Butler (1990) challenged the notion that male leaders behaved logically and females emotionally, this and other research indicated that females in rural and remote communities were expected to match their values to those of the community and to serve the needs of others, whereas males were accepted as default leaders, despite opposing society’s norms (Bjork, 2000; Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Grogan, 2000;
Tallerico, 2000; Wallin & Sackney, 2003; Wilkinson, 2002). Wilkinson reported that one of the principals in her research commented on the subtle implications regarding dress presentation for female principals. She was conscious that she should not dress to advertise her authority, although male principals were not given the same dress standard. A younger principal in the same study defied the implied dress requirements by dressing in stereotypic feminine fashion, leading Wilkinson to pose the hypothesis that in rural areas, not only was leadership grounded in the implicit authority of being male, but was also based on being middle aged, middle class and Anglo Australian.

In summary, the social complexities of living in a rural and remote community influenced the overall leadership experiences of the female beginning teaching principals, particularly those without prior experience of living in those areas. The lack of anonymity, of “living in a gold fish bowl” (O’Mahony & Matthews, 2003, p 12), sabotaged their personal enjoyment and impacted on their leadership.

Accordingly, Wilkinson’s (2002) observations plus the findings from this study, point toward young females, or those without support, being better prepared for the professional and personal isolation the teaching principal role dictates. Likewise, the findings supported proposed initiatives that people already living in rural and remote areas and familiar with the lifestyle be encouraged to undertake study toward becoming a teacher; and that education students undertake practical placements in rural and remote communities to provide a more realistic “understanding of rurality” (Clarke & Wildy, 2011; Australian Council of Deans of Education, 1999; White, 2011, p 4). At the same time, the findings from this study are situated within Butler’s (1990) arguments of a broader and longer term mind-set. As the findings from this study attested, the social experiences of the female teaching principals would have produced more positive outcomes if some small communities were not immersed in a preconceived or structured view of what constituted female. As Butler asserted, “…man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body …and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (p 6). In other words, if conventional cultural expectations for either gender no longer existed, lives would be improved and equality assured.
8.2.4 **Aim four:**

To understand whether specific expectations regarding gender exist in rural and remote communities and if so, the impact they have on the leadership practices of female beginning teaching principals.

The findings from this study signified that community expectations were linked to perceptions of gender behaviour, which in turn played a part in the way the teaching principals experienced the world and impacted on their leadership practices. Elsewhere, researchers have suggested that in some small schools, stereotypes and prejudices make it impossible for females to actualise their potential, as they are disadvantaged by their gender and placed in a no-win situation (Hoyt, 2005; Langford et al, 1998; Schmuck, 1996). For example in this study, Eve believed her rejection was based on the community’s perception of her as a strong female, and that a strong male would not have received the same reaction; and Ann expressed surprise that the community wanted the incoming second teacher to be a male, regardless of his teaching abilities, because he would provide discipline and leadership. These two incidences are indicative of a bias against female leadership.

Meanwhile, Hoyt (2005) argued that when females were successful as leaders they were viewed less favourably because their actions were inconsistent with the perception of desirable female behaviours. Conversely, if a female leader used more acceptable female behaviours of inclusion and compassion, which were not regarded as stereotypic leadership qualities, she would be devalued as a female attempting to be a leader (Langford et al, 1998; Schaef, 1992).

Traditionally, females are frequently faced with a double set of expectations, firstly around their behaviour as leaders and secondly, as females (Hall, 1996). This point was emphasised by Heather, who told of going to the public bar after attending a local race meeting, only to be told by a female community member that she should not be there. As a leader she felt obligated to attend a local function, but as a female she was excluded from certain venues by other females.

Likewise, in her study of female principals in rural settings in Canada, Sherman (2000) reported that challenges to leadership were more likely to come from other females, especially female staff, who objected to having a female principal. Sherman’s finding...
was supported in this study by the all female staff at Jill’s school. The previous principal was a male and well respected by staff, which may have accounted for their negative reaction toward Jill and their failure to accept her leadership. Sherman (2000) concluded that in rural settings females construct obstacles to other females becoming leaders, due to their stereotypic gender expectation that females will focus on their home, husband and child care. This argument is situated within Butler’s (1990) theory that individuals learn early in life what is expected of their gender and spend the rest of their lives maintaining and enforcing their perception of gender order.

Further evidence was added to Butler’s theory by teaching principal Nan, who stated that in some communities, males were a better choice for principal, as they were less inclined to become involved in the “bitchiness” that she believed characterised female relationships. Nan’s observation of the negative connotation of “bitchiness” for females implied that males could deal with situations in a less emotional and more logical state. It raised the issue, posed by Butler of females limiting themselves by the way they constructed and perceived gender roles.

Goeller (1995) however, provided a divergent insight by suggesting that due to females being more inclined toward social interaction and communication, female principals were likely to interact with school stakeholders more frequently than male principals and therefore opened themselves up to greater criticism, or as Nan labelled it, “bitchiness”. Regardless of the reasons, Hall (1996) argued that school relationships were just as challenging as those outside its perimeters, “Schools are no less involved in the reproduction of gender relations than other organisations” (p 33).

In summary, the female teaching principals in this study indicated that gender continues to impact on the working lives of female teaching principals in rural and remote communities and for the most part the impact is negative. Even those who were not personally rebuked for being female, such as Natalie and Alice, were conscious that male leaders were afforded greater respect than females.

Furthermore, the reactions to their gender were generally unexpected, since the interviews at the beginning of the year revealed that the female teaching principals did not perceive that gender would impact significantly on their acceptance, or leadership,
in the small school community. However, at the end of the year, each was able to individually relate stories of innuendo, personal confrontations or implied prejudices against their gender. Their comments mirrored those of Smith and Hale (2002) who reported that it was often not until the female principal moved into the role that she became aware of gender specific barriers. Unfortunately, by then she could be too entrenched in her own and the community’s attitude, to make significant changes. In the case of the teaching principals most severely affected in this study, rather than becoming embedded in the community attitude, they chose, as did the principals in Lester’s (2003) study, to relinquish their role or to seek transfer to a more preferred location.

These issues aside, Butler (1990) argued that social practices are embodied in the way gender is contextually defined. Whether that is through clothing, appearance, or social interactions, individuals are accepted or rejected based on their compliance with societal norms (Lester, 2008; Wilkinson, 2002). In this study, the small school community stakeholders indicated either implicitly or explicitly, that they held expectations of how their socially constructed nature of gender should be performed. When gender norms are ignored within a particular society, behaviour is identified as inappropriate and problematic and can lead to the individual being ostracised (Butler, 2004). Both Eve and Jill and to a lesser extent, Heather and Nan, reported feeling excluded by the school and broader community. In Butler’s (1990) terms, this could be due to the role of school principal being defined as a male role and the difficulties they experienced being caused by the contextually social construction of gender. These findings are significant to the understanding of female small school leadership as they provide illuminating examples of the role gender plays in the day-to-day experiences of female teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities.
8.2.5 Aim five:

To evaluate the leadership experiences of female beginning teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities and its implications for future career direction.

The leadership experiences of female principals in rural and remote school communities have historically been overshadowed by the challenge of gaining acceptance in areas with a predominant culture of rugged, aggressive and confrontational male leadership (Giles, 1995; Michael, 1996; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). Studies have shown that males are forgiven behaviours that would not be excused if demonstrated by a female and females are permitted fewer errors than males (Sungaila, 1982; Smith & Hale, 2002; Tallerico, 2000; B. Watterston, 2010 b). Elsewhere, it has been observed that when patriarchal norms dominate a community culture, females are less likely to be afforded leadership credibility (Coleman et al, 1998).

For that reason, females are more likely to be accepted as leaders if they do not oppose the community’s values and if their leadership fits the accepted view of females being inclusive, collaborative and nurturing (Bjork, 2000; Duncan & Seguin, 2002; Grogan, 2000; Wallin & Sackney, 2003). In this way, they maintain society’s norms and stay within the social construction of gender (Butler, 1990; Lorber, 1994). When Eve stepped outside their expectations by dealing with the abuse issue in a determined and strong manner, Butler (1990) would attest that she was marginalised for being assertive (Mistry, 2000).

Generally, teaching principals’ leadership has been further hindered by the workload and the dual complexities of teaching and administrative duties. In smaller schools, the teaching principal is frequently the only teacher for all year levels from “prep” to year 7, with all the curriculum and lesson planning that entails. They do that in addition to managing the administrative tasks of budgets, finances, staffing and facilities, and providing leadership (Armstrong, 2002; Clarke & Stephens, 2006; Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Lester, 2001 & 2003; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Starr & White, 2008).

Accordingly, research has indicated that the turnover rate of teaching principals in rural and remote areas is considerably higher than for non-teaching principals in urban centres (Lester, 2001; Whittall, 2001). Whittall reported a turnover of eight or nine
teaching principals in a ten year period in New Zealand, compared to none or one change in the same period for non-teaching principals; while Lester reported a 45% turnover of teaching principals in one region in Queensland in a one year period. This study supported those findings. At the end of their first year, four of the eleven teaching principals left the school community; three left during their second year; and two left at the end of their second year. Only two of the eleven female beginning teaching principals continued in the same school for more than two years and of those two, Iris retired during her fourth year and Natalie was granted maternity leave at the end of her fourth year. Only Sally went on to become principal at a higher band school.

One of the negative experiences reported by the teaching principals was lack of support from the departmental district office personnel. On the one hand, the teaching principals were reluctant to ask for assistance for fear of being labeled as not coping, but on the other hand, were obviously not coping when they were “at breaking point” and asked for help. They also perceived that insufficient training was provided prior to commencing in the role and this has been raised on a number of occasions in the literature (Bahnisch, 2006; Coleman, 2007; Collins, 2002b; Dempster, 2001; Eddy, 2006; Garcia-Garduno et al, 2011; McCulla, 2011; Rhode, 2002; Sherman, 2002; Walker et al, 2003; J. Watterston, 2010 a). The teaching principals confirmed that training for leadership should be contextually specific and relate to the real world practices of their schools. They were also concerned that any leadership training offered after they commenced in the role, took them away from the school and students’ parents did not approve of them being out of school to attend training or meetings. Moreover, as training tended to be presented in regional centres, travel and overnight accommodation was necessary and extended the time spent away from school. In addition, none of the teaching principals was offered a mentor, despite research consistently signifying its value (McCulla, 2011; McMurtrie, 1997; O’Mahony & Matthews, 2003; J. Watterston, 2010 a). The teaching principals agreed with research that proposed that having a mentor guide them through the complexities of their leadership would have been valuable, but only if the mentor was experienced in small school leadership (Baugh, 2003; Bright & Ware, 2003; Bush & Glover, 2004; Davis et al, 2005; Hobson et al, 2003).
In discussing training needs for the role of teaching principal, it should be noted that females traditionally demonstrate a preference to be trained prior to undertaking the role, in contrast to males who are more willing to learn on the job (Maunder & Warren, 2008; J. Watterston, 2010 a). Furthermore, as was evidenced in this study, females struggled to obtain concrete experiences to provide them with credibility prior to applying for the principalship, whereas males were more likely to be approached to undertake the role (Coleman, 2007; Cooke, 2010, Sherman, 2005; J. Watterston, 2010 a). For example, five of the eleven principals who participated in this study had no previous experience in a leadership role; two acted for just one or two weeks while the substantive principal was attending training; one acted as a deputy principal for a short time; and two acted as principals for a semester in the school where they were currently based. Only Iris acted as principal in several schools prior to being offered the substantive position and Jill had previous experience as a teaching principal in a smaller school.

In summary, this study depicted the social and cultural factors which impacted on the leadership experiences of eleven female neophyte teaching principals in small rural and remote school communities. Ideally, rural and remote female teaching principals should be socially matched to the area in which they will work and live, but as that is not always logistically possible, they require a supportive working environment from their employer and from the local community (Clarke & Wildy, 2011; White, 2011). Appropriate support could ensure a willingness to remain in the community, thereby providing a cohesive and stable education for rural and remote students (Saiti, 2005). The findings also highlighted that leadership in a rural and remote area school does not necessarily lead to career advancement. Five years after commencing as a teaching principal, only Sally progressed to a higher band school.

As noted earlier, the female teaching principals were not aware at the commencement of this research the impact their gender would have on their leadership experiences within the community. That is a relevant finding for this study and has not been exposed in contemporary leadership literature. As Butler (1990) asserted, it is not until an individual steps outside their expected gender performance, that attention is paid to underlying prejudices.
8.3 Practical Implications

One of the more obvious findings from this study was that female beginning teaching principals struggled with their new role. The duality and multi faceted aspect of the job was daunting, isolating and demanded their time and energy. They identified time management, systemic requirements, communication and staff and community relationships as areas of particular concern and as conflicting with their core responsibility of teaching students. Although it was perceived as outside their control, they asserted that the number of days allocated for administrative duties was insufficient for the demands of the workload and needed to be addressed. Similar observations were made regarding teaching principals’ workloads in earlier research (Clarke, 2003; Howley & Pendarvis, 2002; Jones, 2006; Lester, 2001; Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; O’Mahony & Matthews, 2003; Wilson, 2009). Consequently, the teaching principals recommended that due to the dual responsibilities of the role, the teaching principal needed to be an experienced teacher with good disciplinary skills, knowledge of the whole school curriculum and familiar with working in multi age classes. In comments similar to those made by the ICPA (2009), they advocated that teachers with limited classroom experience or multi age teaching, not be assigned the role.

From a practical perspective, females who aspire to leadership roles within the state education system and are willing to serve their apprenticeship in a small school community, should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the issues that female principals encounter. Those issues include the need to be self confident and assertive; to be prepared for the isolation of the role, both professionally and personally; be aware that their decisions may be challenged; that males may be seen as default leaders and more authoritarian; that female stereotypic behaviours of being nurturing, collaborative and a good communicator are expected; and that other females could present the greatest resistance to their leadership (Celikten, 2005; Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Dempsey, 1992; Schaefer, 1992; Sinclair, 1998; Sungaila, 1982; Tallerico, 2000; B. Watterston, 2010 b; Wilkinson, 2002)).

By understanding and being prepared for these issues, they may develop strategies to avoid negative experiences and emulate positive ones (Smith & Hale, 2002). It bears clarifying however, that the issues relating to female educational leaders are dependent
on the specific context in which they are lived and the impact on them professionally and personally (Louis et al, 2010. Mulford, 2005). At the same time, aspiring female principals may take the opportunity to make a concerted effort to develop supportive relationships in the years prior to applying for the role.

Historically, leadership training has focused more on knowledge training, than on personal and humanistic skills and has neglected the relational skills necessary for females in small communities (Brewster & Klump, 2005; Daresh & Arrowsmith, 2003; Daresh & Playko, 1994; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Mulford & Johns, 2004). As worthwhile as knowledge training is, it does not allow individuals to evaluate the way their behaviour impacts on others, such as the staff and community at large, or the influence gender has on an established community (Loader, 2003). This study proposes that a deeper understanding of the interactions among these factors may shape the development of future female teaching principals.

Consequently, it is argued that the content and design of training programmes for beginning teaching principals be re-assessed and include the opportunity to network professionally; to discuss and reflect on practice and to debate the “big picture” of education; deliver ongoing support for day-to-day issues; and provide experienced small school teaching principals as mentors to guide the newly appointed and model positive behaviours (Baugh, 2003; Bush & Glover, 2004; Clarke & Stevens, 2006; Davis et al, 2005; Hobson et al, 2003; Howley et al, 2002; O’Mahony & Matthews, 2003). Research has consistently shown that a mentor is an effective aide for beginning principals (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Capasso & Daresh, 2001; Ehrich et al, 2004; Hobson, 2003; Howley et al, 2002; Luck, 2003; Mertz, 2004; O’Mahony, 2003). The teaching principals in this study supported the notion of a mentor, but added that they must be familiar with working in rural and remote environments. They also proffered the suggestion of working with other new principals in similar environments, with a view to sharing curriculum and systemic document preparation, to reduce their workload.

Overwhelmingly however, the teaching principals’ opinions support earlier research, which indicated training needed to focus on the fundamental day to day tasks of the role, rather than on formal leadership training programmes (Cardno, 2003; Collins, 2002b; Eddy, 2006; Martin & Robertson, 2003; Walker et al, 2003). Moreover, the
providers of training programmes for beginning teaching principals in rural and remote areas, needed to be cognisant of the time required for principals to attend training, the effect on their energy levels and the community perceptions of them being out of the school (Jones, 2006). On the one hand, programmes need to be useful, practical and relevant to the context of the beginning principal’s needs in a rural and remote location, while on the other hand, they should allow the opportunity to focus on problem solving and self reflection (Baugh, 2003; Bush & Glover, 2004; Davis et al, 2005). Similarly, as the teaching principals involved in this study observed, district and regional office personnel need to provide adequate support and guidance to new teaching principals and not wait until they have reached, as Heather stated, “breaking point”.

Heeding female beginning teaching principals’ personal accounts of their experiences as school leaders has value and the knowledge gleaned from their stories should be disseminated to aspirants to provide a knowledge base on which to draw for professional development and growth (Regan & Brooks, 1995). The insights gained from this study could help in the development of skills and strategies for aspiring female principals to achieve their professional goals and avoid the obstacles, mentioned earlier, that were encountered by their colleagues. Using these firsthand accounts to address contemporary issues could empower others to achieve success and lead to a fulfilling career within educational administration. Essentially, the teaching principals in this study agreed that the chances of a successful first year as principal are increased when novices have realistic previews of the job (Hartzell, Williams & Nelson, 1995). Likewise, Duncan and Seguin (2002) asked, “What can be more realistic than the thoughts and words of the first year principal coupled with the perceptions and words of those working with her?” (p 627).

The implications from this research are consistent with recommendations made by Tomlinson (1994), regarding attracting and retaining staff in rural and remote parts of Western Australia. In essence, universities need to realign their pre-service training courses to take multi age teaching into account; females should be made aware of the context specific nature of rural and remote communities; mentoring relationships and professional networks should be established prior to undertaking country service; pre-service teachers should undertake a rural and remote practicum; and staff from the
employing body’s regional office should provide support and training in local cultures and systemic requirements prior to embarking on the role.

Finally, it is worth noting that some teaching principals believed they gained from participating in this study. Their responses suggested that at an operational level, it caused them to review their interaction with colleagues and the community and to consider their role within the school, while at a broader level it honed the critical reflection of their leadership skills. This insight suggests that effective school principals must be self reflective and challenge themselves to explore the barriers they personally bring to the leadership role (Carrow-Moffett, 1993). It also suggests that having the opportunity to reflect in a non-threatening environment is beneficial to their overall wellbeing. Consistent with research by Hall (1996) and Dunshea (1998), those teaching principals without partners commented on the need to participate in similar debriefing sessions on a more regular basis and advised that they found participating in this research highlighted that need. It should be noted that the participants were aware that the researcher was employed by the same employer as themselves, but were also aware of the nature and confidential role the researcher performed within the department. They were therefore able to relax and express themselves openly in a non-threatening environment, without fear of judgement or repercussions. This factor should be taken into account when encouraging neophyte principals to discuss their situations and in the selection of mentors or district small school advisors.

8.4 Contribution to knowledge

This study has provided an insightful view of life for female teaching principals in rural and remote small school communities, not previously presented. While it may seem obvious that the influence of the teaching principal’s formative years, work experiences and perceptions of gender play a significant part in the practices of a female beginning teaching principal, what has been less obvious, has been the depth of influence they brought to bear. By generating insights into how a female teaching principal views the experience of living and working in a rural and remote area, a better understanding is
afforded into the personal and professional decisions they make in the future and what it took for eleven females to commence their professional journey.

Moreover, by charting the career paths of the teaching principals over a five year period (see Appendix E) it was possible to determine the influence the role played in their futures. One of the distinctive outcomes from this study was the previously unknown and un-researched fact that the role of Head of Curriculum (HOC), a newly designated position at the commencement of this research, was viewed as a more favourable option for career advancement than that of teaching principal. The HOC was seen to be paid the same salary, but not to be accountable for the whole school, and therefore have fewer responsibilities, while at the same time being released from classroom duties more frequently. Those who assumed the HOC role after leaving the teaching principal role commented on the less demanding nature of the position.

This study was unique in that it followed Butler’s (1990) assertion that individuals are constrained by society’s expectations of gender and that the performance of gender persists in some isolated communities. Butler would argue that the evidence from this study demonstrated that the social experiences of the female teaching principals were hindered by the preconceived notion of what constituted a female. The way sex and gender is viewed is fundamental to the conventional roles attached to gender, leading Butler to assert that while sex differences continued to create classifications of male and female, true equality was not possible (Young, 1998). She argued that feminine or masculine performances create the ideology of gender and that gender emerges as a reality only to the extent that it is performed (Lester, 2008).

Furthermore, the findings from this study challenged the assumption that the experiences of male teaching principals are generalisable to all teaching principals and that gender is irrelevant to the role. The female teaching principals discovered that the reactions to their being female added unwanted pressure to what was already a demanding and complex role. Accordingly, this study met Dunshea’s (1998) recommendation that future studies of school leadership be cognisant of geographic location as well as gender. However, this study went one step further and added that commencing a career as a principal in a rural and remote area is impeded firstly by being female and secondly by lack of experience. The combination of these two factors
has not previously been explored in the literature. In addition, the teaching principals’ identification of the communities’ reactions to their being female highlighted the lack of literature that addressed this aspect of small school leadership.

Essentially, this study enhanced the understanding of gender disparity in educational administration by providing valuable, firsthand information that could be used to develop in-service training for females interested in a career path in school leadership. In the process, it identified isolated communities’ responses to gender, which will assist aspiring female teaching principals confront the negative inter-relatedness of gender and small communities. In other words, it significantly contributed to educational knowledge by investigating how females responded to the interactions of the conflicting community constructions of femaleness while performing in the male constructed role of principal (Skrla, 2000).

Butler (1990) argued that gender identity is shaped by society so that individuals’ behave in a particular manner in order to be considered “normal”. As a result, society is reinforced for its perception of what is masculine or feminine behaviour. Behaviour that falls outside standard gender configurations is considered pathological and needs to be marginalised. Therefore, when females assume masculine assigned leadership roles, they are viewed as resisting society and undermining its standards. As attested by some teaching principals in this research, if gender is not performed according to expectations, punishment through exclusion is likely to be exacted. Within this context, the findings from this research consistently confirmed Butler’s contention of gender identity being shaped by society.

Unlike other studies, by using interviews pre and post experience, it was possible to demonstrate that gender social practices are contextually defined in isolated communities. When gender norms for that society are ignored, behaviour is identified as inappropriate and the individual is regarded as an outcast. Within the context of this study, the role of school principal was defined as a male role and females who attempted to assume the role were considered atypical females. Interestingly, at the commencement of this study the female teaching principals were generally ignorant of the role gender would play in their acceptance, but as Butler (1990) testified, it was not
Chapter 8 Conclusion

until they stepped outside the stereotypic performance, that the community prejudices became evident.

In summary, this study into female leadership in rural communities provides a new way to understand the issues evidenced in rural and remote settings. The perspectives of the female teaching principals provide a contrast to the more common androcentric view of teaching principals in rural and remote areas and highlight the fact that previous research in this area has been largely ignored. Overall the study has provided a powerful analysis of social reality for female teaching principals in rural and remote areas.

8.5 Limitations of the research

At the time this research commenced, there were 303 Band 5 schools and 137 Band 6 schools in Queensland led by a teaching principal. Of those, thirty Band 5 and fourteen Band 6 schools advertised principal vacancies. Therefore, one of the limitations of this study was generalisability, as it relied on the participation of twelve female beginning teaching principals in the first phase of the research and eleven in the second phase and their experiences may not be indicative of experiences for all neophyte female teaching principals. Furthermore, seventeen stakeholders took part in the interviews at the beginning of the year and eight at the end of year and not all schools were represented by a stakeholder. Consequently, the findings can only reflect the views of those teaching principals and stakeholders who participated in this study.

8.6 Implications for future research

While this research addressed the aims that inspired it, it raised additional questions regarding the experiences of females who seek to be successful in small rural and remote school communities. For instance, females in the older age group were more likely to enjoy living in an isolated area, but were also more likely to be married and with a partner who provided emotional support. At the same time, the older participants were less likely to be subjected to negative gender comments. Future studies should address the relevance of age and marital status on acceptance into small communities.
Similarly, it would be worth exploring if females were more likely to delay applying for the principalship until their own children were independent and living away from home and the impact that has on age for entering the principalship. Earlier research has indicated that in larger schools with non-teaching principals, females are older than males because they wait for their own children to grow up before applying for the role (Sherman, 2000; Wilson et al, 2006). One of the older females in this study, Ann, alluded to a similar situation when she said, “For me it was a bigger decision than it might be for a young person, to pack up my life to move 750km west and leave my kids behind.” Concomitant future research could consider if a correlation existed between raising a family, willingness to relocate and differences in the source of encouragement for males and females to apply for the role.

Because the focus of this study was on female neophyte teaching principals, it was outside its aims to draw comparisons between the experiences of females and males undertaking the same role. However, a parallel study addressing the nature of gender experiences would be worthy of a separate investigation. Likewise, although this study briefly considered the classroom experiences of the teaching principals, a future study, especially a comparative study of males and females, could address the number of years spent in the classroom prior to applying for the principalship and its impact on acceptance, satisfaction and stress levels.

One of the outcomes from this study was the continued preference for male leaders. Butler (1990) sought to break the link between gender and expectations, in order for everyone to be viewed as an individual human being, rather than as a male or female, but this has not occurred in some rural and remote locations. It leaves a question mark over the absence of an attitude shift toward female leadership for stakeholders and hence leaves questions unanswered as to why some female teaching principals, such as Natalie and Alice, met with limited resistance, while others such as Eve and Heather, were regularly challenged. It has been suggested that the reasons could be found in the traditionally constructed culture of the community, whereby the behaviour of leaders is perceived as atypical for females, but typical for males (Dempsey, 1992; Grace, 1994). Whereas, Butler (1990) claimed that certain cultural configurations of gender have come to seem natural in most cultures and that informal social interactions, such as in
small rural and remote communities, create and bolster patterns of dominance and submission, thereby reinforcing the norms of femininity and masculinity (Lester, 2008). Future researchers are encouraged to assiduously explore stakeholders’ attitudes in rural and remote communities.

Finally, from a psychological perspective, future research could seek to measure levels of confidence, assertiveness and emotional intelligence prior to and after undertaking the role. As the principals noted in this study, they were surprised by the level of confidence the role required.

Ongoing research into females in leadership positions is required in order for aspiring female leaders and others connected to educational administration, to hear and understand the lived experiences of females in teaching principal roles in rural and remote locations. Without this knowledge, other females in similar situations, will feel frustrated by the culture of the community and question only themselves, rather than also questioning the social structures in which they are placed (Grogan, 1996). Future research, targeting females’ experiences, should be inclusive of the female perspective, as an understanding of this perspective adds to the knowledge base of educational administration and leadership and identifies areas warranting further research.

In conclusion, contemporary studies tend to concur that females in leadership roles have experienced challenges and some bias related to their gender (Ball & Reay, 2000; Haase, 2007; Michael, 1996; Russell, 1999; Sherman, 2000; Wallin & Sackney, 2003; Watterston, 2010a). Moreover, there is often conjecture and expectation to that effect, leading to a generalised belief that females will have experienced at least some gender prejudice. In designing this research it was therefore essential not to make presuppositions and to be detached and balanced in examining the experiences of the participants. Accordingly, this study guarded against making those suppositions by basing its findings wholly on the experiences and firsthand accounts of the participants and not on a prior hypothesis. Furthermore, this study was unique in that it followed elements of a five year longitudinal study to determine not only the outcomes from the first year as a female teaching principal, but also draw attention to the career progress over a five year period for the same cohort of participants, rather than providing generalised data.
This study established that females commencing their leadership careers as teaching principals in rural and remote schools face a challenging task. They not only confront the dual responsibilities of teaching and leading the school, but at the same time they must manoeuvre their way through complex relationships with school stakeholders. The eleven female beginning teaching principals involved in this research discovered that as a result of their firsthand experiences many of their views on leadership changed and they credited the majority of those changes to stakeholders’ expectations. Through the use of those firsthand accounts it was possible to observe the gendered nature of leadership in rural and remote communities and its effect on prospective female educational leaders’ careers. Of particular significance was the finding relating to leadership and gender. Essentially, this study demonstrated that female leadership continues to be viewed as atypical of leadership and stereotypic feminine behaviour, in some isolated communities.
APPENDICES

Appendix A – Ethical Protocol – Griffith University
Appendix B – Ethical Protocol – Education Queensland
Appendix C – Information provided to teaching principals
Appendix D – Information provided to stakeholders
Appendix E – 5 years later – “Where are they now?”
Appendix A – Ethical Protocol – Griffith University

GRiffith University Human Research Ethics Committee
12-Jul-2005

Dear Dr Skinner,

I write further to the additional information provided in relation to the conditional approval granted to your application for ethical clearance for your project "Beginning female teaching principals: Adjustment and small community experiences" (GU Ref No: EPS/02/05/HRBEC).

This is to confirm receipt of the remaining required information, assurances or amendments to this protocol.

Consequently, I reconfirm my earlier advice that you are authorized to immediately commence this research on this basis.

The standard conditions of approval attached to our previous correspondence about this protocol continue to apply.

Regards

Gary Allen
Manager, Research Ethics
Office for Research
Sray Centre, Nathan Campus
Griffith University
ph: 3875 5585
fax: 3875 7994
email: g.allen@griffith.edu.au
web:

Cc:

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Appendix B – Ethical Protocol – Education Queensland

10 May 2005
Ms Cheryl Cleary Gilbert
PO Box 3017
Mackay North  QLD  4740

Dear Ms Gilbert

Thank you for your application seeking approval to conduct research titled “Beginning female teaching principals: Adjustment and small community experiences” in Queensland State Schools. I wish to advise that your application has been approved subject to your confirmation of participating schools.

This means that you can approach principals of the schools and invite them to support your research project. As detailed in the research guidelines:

• You need to obtain approval from the relevant principals before your research project can commence.

• Principals have the right to decline participation if they consider that the research will cause undue disruption to educational programs in their schools.

• Principals have the right to monitor any research activities conducted in their facilities and can withdraw their support at any time.

At the conclusion of your study, you are required to provide the Department of Education and the Arts with a summary of your research results and any published paper resulting from this study. A summary of your research findings should also be forwarded to participating principals.

Should you require further information on the approval process please do not hesitate to contact Dr Roland Simone, Senior Research Officer, Strategic Policy and Education Futures Division on (07) 3237 0417. Please quote the file number 550/27/348 in future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Carol Markle-Dadds
Acting Assistant Director
Education Futures
Strategic Policy and Education Futures Division
Trin ref: 05/43302
Appendix C – Information provided to teaching principals

Introduction letter
Information sheet
Consent form
Biographical information
Letter to Teaching Principals

PO Box
Mackay North 4740
Telephone (Home)
Date:

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my PhD research - Beginning female teaching principals: Adjustment and small community experiences.

I have attached an Information Sheet which will give you more detailed particulars about the study. You may wish to retain it for your records. Also attached is a Consent Form which you are required to sign, agreeing to participate in the study. Please keep one copy and return a signed copy in the enclosed envelope. I have also attached a biographical information sheet which you may choose to complete and return with the signed Consent Form, eliminating the need for some basic questions when I telephone you for the interview.

The interview will be semi-structured but will address issues such as:

- Expectations you have of yourself as a teaching principal
- The likely traps you perceive as you move into the role
- Skills you believe a teaching principal requires
- Characteristics you think make a successful leader
- Any concerns you have about becoming a leader
- Any technical and managerial aspects of the job that concern you
- Understanding the culture of the school and community
- Expectations you think other staff, community members, P & C will have of you
- Your expectations of the EDS/RED
- Expected stressors in the role
- Your support network

I will telephone you in early January to arrange a suitable date and time for the interview. In the meantime, could you please sign the attached Consent Form and complete the biography questions and return in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible.

Thank you for your participation,

Cheryl Cleary Gilbert, JP
BA, DipPsych, Grad Dip Ed (Teach),
BEdSt, MPhil, MAPS, MACE
**Information Sheet – Teaching principals**

**Beginning female teaching principals:**
*Adjustment and small community experiences*

**Chief Investigator:** Cheryl Cleary Gilbert  
Education Queensland  
Mackay District Office  
Telephone: 4951 6800  
Email: cheryl.gilbert@qed.qld.gov.au

**Background**
Teaching principals tend to be drawn from relatively young classroom teachers with little life or leadership experience. They frequently commence their principalship in small rural or mining communities, with limited support or knowledge of how to adapt to the change in their teaching status. Some females have reported particular difficulties when thrust into the role of leadership in small communities, and evidence suggests they are likely to abandon their dreams of educational leadership based on their early experiences. This study seeks to determine what, if any, particular issues confront beginning female teaching principals in small school communities. It examines the strategies the female teaching principal adopts in order to achieve professional and personal success in her leadership role; the perception she has of her performance; and the perception the school community has of her performance and leadership.

**What participation in this study involves**
Participation in this study involves providing biographic information, including educational and leadership experience, and small school community experiences, which will serve to provide an understanding of the demographics of small school teaching principals. All female beginning teaching principals in Queensland will be asked to participate in the first phase of the study, which will involve an interview with the researcher to determine general information mentioned above about her background, past experiences and leadership perceptions and about her expectations of the community and the school. The second phase of the study will occur toward the end of the first year as principal, when five principals will be asked to participate in a more detailed, unstructured interview with the researcher to provide details about the year’s experiences, perceptions of success and leadership, and acceptance by the community.

With your agreement, other staff, community members and district office staff will be asked for their input into the success of the school year. Previous academic data from the Years 2,3,5 and 7 tests, as well as the School Opinion Survey, Student enrolments and staff absenteeism, will be analysed in conjunction with the current year’s results.
Consent to participate
Your participation is voluntary and you are not under any obligation to consent to participate in this research. Non-participation will not involve any penalty, affect any current or future promotion or influence your eligibility for movement within Education Queensland. If you initially agree to participate but later change your mind, you may discontinue participation without penalty or without providing an explanation. We hope that you will consider participation in this study, which although may not benefit you directly, may have the potential to improve the quality of future female teaching principals’ careers.

Risk
Participation in this research poses no risks as the research asks only for background information, for your perceptions of working in a small school community and how you have adapted to your role.

Confidentiality
The data collected from this research will be reported in general terms only and will not involve any identifying features of you or the area in which you teach. Your name will not be disclosed and will be known only to the interviewer. All data will be kept confidential and in a locked filing cabinet in the School of Education at Griffith University for a period of 5 years before being destroyed. A report of the general findings from the study will be made available to participants.

You may contact Dr. James Skinner (Education Faculty, School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Gold Coast campus) if you have any concerns regarding the research that you wish to discuss, or if you prefer an independent person you may contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Bray Centre, Griffith University, Kessels Road, Nathan, Qld 4111, telephone (07) 3875 5585 or email research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Griffith University thanks you for your consent and participation in this research.
Consent Form - Teaching principals

Beginning female teaching principals: Adjustment and small community experiences

I have read the information form and understand that:

• This research is to investigate issues relating specifically to beginning female teaching principals in small school communities

• I am being asked initially to participate in the first phase of the study, which involves an interview with the researcher, at which time I will provide biographical information, as well as details about my experiences in teaching, my leadership expectations and any small school community experiences and perceptions

• The interview should take about 60 minutes

• If I am selected to participate in phase two, I am aware that I will form one of five case studies and will be asked to participate in a detailed interview at the end of the first year as principal. This second interview will relate to my experiences of being a beginning female teaching principal, my perceptions of being a female leader in a small school community and the strategies I used to be successful in that role.

• This second interview should take about 90 minutes

• I am aware that other staff, members of the community and district office personnel will be asked to participate in the research and to provide information regarding my successful leadership of the school.

• I am aware that previous year’s school academic data from Years 2,3,5,7, as well as School Opinion Surveys, student enrolment and staff absenteeism will be analysed along with the same data sources at the end of my first year as principal. I am aware that the data alone will not be used as a measure of successful leadership.

• My participation is voluntary and I may discontinue my participation at anytime without penalty or explanation

• Any reports or publications from this study will be reported in general terms and will not involve any identifying features of me or the area where I teach

• The data will be kept confidential at all times and in a locked filing cabinet in the chief investigator’s office for a period of 5 years before being destroyed

• A report about the study findings will be made available to me.
I have read the information sheet and the consent form. I agree to participate in this study and give my consent freely. I understand that the study will be carried out as described in the information statement, a copy of which I have retained. I realise that whether or not I decide to participate in this research is my decision and will not affect my future with Education Queensland. I also realise that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. I have had all questions answered to my satisfaction.

................................................................. ........................................
Name and Signature Date

................................................................. ........................................
Investigator Name and Signature Date

Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee Clearance: EPS/02/05/HREC
Education Queensland Approval: 550/27/348
Biographical Information - Teaching Principals

Name

Age: □ 20-30 □ 31-40 □ 41-50 □ 51-60 □ 61+

Qualifications (Please include Education qualifications as well as any other, e.g. Business, Physiotherapy, etc. degrees or diplomas).

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Employment History (including teaching)

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Is this your first experience as teaching principal?

□ Yes □ No

Number of years experience in previous schools and roles (e.g. 2 years as classroom teacher; 1year as deputy, 5 years as senior teacher, etc).

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Number of applications for principalship prior to this one

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What training have you received for the role of principal? (e.g. duties in other schools? Courses attended? Acting principal?)

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What are your career aspirations?

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Have you previously lived or worked in a small school community?

□ Yes □ No
Appendix D – Information provided to stakeholders

Introduction letter
Information sheet
Consent form
Biographical information
Letter to Stakeholders

PO Box
Mackay North 4740
Telephone  (Home)
Date:

Dear

Thank you for participating in my PhD research - *Beginning female teaching principals: Adjustment and small community experiences*.

I have attached an Information Sheet which will give you detailed particulars about the study. You may wish to retain it for your records. Also attached is a Consent Form which you are required to sign if you agree to participate in the study. Please keep one copy and return a signed copy either by scanning and sending by e-mail, or posting to the address shown above. I have also attached a biographical information sheet which you may choose to complete and return with the signed Consent Form, eliminating the need for some basic questions when I telephone you for the interview.

The interview will be semi-structured but will address issues such as:

- Expectations you have of a teaching principal
- Skills you believe a teaching principal requires
- Characteristics you think make a successful leader
- Expectations you think the principal has of you
- Issues you perceive create stress for the principal
- Actions of the current principal that you perceive create a positive school climate

If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact me on the phone number listed above. As you are someone who has lived in the community for some time and has worked with a number of principals I am confident you will have insights into school operations and small school communities which will be invaluable to this research.

Thank you for your participation,

Cheryl Cleary Gilbert, JP
BA, DipPsych, Grad Dip Ed (Teach), BEdSt, MPhil, MAPS, MACE
Information Sheet - stakeholders
(including school staff, community members, district office personnel)

Beginning female teaching principals:
Adjustment and small community experiences

Chief Investigator: Cheryl Cleary Gilbert
Education Queensland
Mackay District Office
Telephone: 4951 6800
Email: cheryl.gilbert@qed.qld.gov.au

Background
Teaching principals tend to be drawn from relatively young classroom teachers with little life or leadership experience. They frequently commence their principalship in small rural or mining communities, with limited support or knowledge of how to adapt to the change in their teaching status. Some females have reported particular difficulties when thrust into the role of leadership in small communities, and evidence suggests they are likely to abandon their dreams of educational leadership based on their early experiences. This study seeks to determine what, if any, particular issues confront beginning female teaching principals in small school communities. It examines the strategies the female teaching principal adopts in order to achieve professional and personal success in her leadership role; the perception she has of her performance; and the perception the school community has of her performance and leadership.

What participation in this study involves
This study will be conducted in two phases. The first phase involves interviewing beginning female teaching principals who have agreed to participate, prior to the commencement of the school year. The first phase also includes interviewing school stakeholders at the school with a participating beginning female teaching principal, toward the end of first term, or beginning of second term. The interview will address the stakeholder’s perception of the principal’s early performance and the expectations they have of a female principal in a small school community. The second phase, for stakeholders, will occur at the end of the first year of the female teaching principal in the role of principal. This interview will seek to determine to what extent the principal met the expectations of leadership by the individual stakeholders and the observed strategies the female principal used to achieve that success.
In addition to your comments regarding successful leadership, previous academic data from the Years 2, 3, 5 and 7 tests, the School Opinion Survey, Student enrolments and staff absenteeism, will be analysed along with the current year’s results.

**Consent to participate**

Participation in this research is voluntary and stakeholders are under no obligation to consent to participate in the research. Non-participation will not involve any penalty, or affect any level of involvement with the school. Participants may choose to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or without providing an explanation. While the research may not benefit the teaching principal participants directly it may have the potential to improve the quality of future female teaching principals in small schools.

**Risk**

Participation in this research poses no risks as the research asks only that participants identify their expectations and perceptions of female leadership in small schools.

**Confidentiality**

The data collected from this research will be reported in general terms only and will not involve any identifying features of you or the area in which you work or live. Your name will not be disclosed and will be known only to the interviewer. All data will be kept confidential and in a locked filing cabinet in the School of Education at Griffith University for a period of 5 years before being destroyed. A report of the general findings from the study will be made available to participants. You may contact Dr. James Skinner (Education Faculty, School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Gold Coast campus) if you have any concerns regarding the research that you wish to discuss, or if you prefer an independent person you may contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Bray Centre, Griffith University, Kessels Road, Nathan, Qld 4111, telephone (07) 3875 5585 or email research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

Griffith University thanks you for your consent and participation in this research.

Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee Clearance: EPS/02/05/HREC
Education Queensland Approval: 550/27/348
Appendices

Consent form - stakeholders
(including school staff, community members, district office personnel)

Beginning female teaching principals:
Adjustment and small community experiences

I have read the information sheet and understand that:

• This research is to investigate issues relating specifically to beginning female teaching principals in small school communities

• I will be asked to participate in the first phase of the study, which involves an interview with the researcher at the end of the first term of the beginning female teaching principal being in the school. At that time I will provide information in relation to my expectations of a female principal in a small school, and the perceptions I have of leadership in the community.

• The interview should take about 60 minutes

• In phase two of the study, I will be asked to participate in a detailed interview at the end of the first year of the principal being in the school. This second interview will seek to determine to what extent the principal met the expectations of leadership I have and the strategies I observed the female principal use to achieve that success.

• This second interview should take about 60 minutes

• I am aware that my comments on leadership will be amalgamated with an analysis of the systemic data from the principal’s first year, as well as data from years prior to the principal’s arrival. This data will include academic results from Years 2,3,5,7 tests, School Opinion Surveys, student enrolment and staff absenteeism. I am aware that my comments alone will not be used as a measure of successful leadership.

• My participation is voluntary and I may discontinue my participation at anytime without penalty or explanation

• Any reports or publications from this study will be reported in general terms and will not involve any identifying features of me or the area where I work or live

• The data will be kept confidential at all times and in a locked filing cabinet in the chief investigator’s office for a period of 5 years before being destroyed

• A report about the study findings will be made available to me.
I have read the information sheet and the consent form. I agree to participate in this study and give my consent freely. I understand that the study will be carried out as described in the information statement, a copy of which I have retained. I realise that whether or not I decide to participate in this research is my decision and will not affect my future with Education Queensland. I also realise that I can withdraw from the study at any time and that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. I have had all questions answered to my satisfaction.

........................................................................................................
Name and Signature                                Date

........................................................................................................
Investigator Name and Signature                   Date
Biographical Information - Stakeholders

Name………………………………… Gender □ Female □ Male

School………………………………

Age: □ 20-30 □ 31-40 □ 41-50 □ 51-60 □ 61+

Current role within school

Number of years worked at or been associated with current school
(please indicate each role separately, e.g. 5 years as parent plus 3 years as teacher aide)

Number of years lived in this community

If not on school staff, what is your employment

Number of principals you have previously worked with at this school

Number of principals you have worked with at other schools

What do you perceive as the current strengths of the present principal

In which area/s do you perceive the present principal requires further assistance to be successful
Appendix E - 5 years later – “Where are they now?”

Contact was maintained over a five year period with the eleven teaching principals who participated in both stages of this study, in order to determine the impact that working as a teaching principal had on their careers. In summary, two returned to classroom teaching; two accepted Head of Curriculum (HOC) positions and acted as deputy principals when the opportunity arose; one accepted a substantive deputy principal position in a large school; two retired; one resigned and commenced her own business; and three remained as substantive teaching principals. Of those three, five years after commencing as a teaching principal in a rural and remote school, only one was actively working as a teaching principal in a higher band school; while one was working on a regional project; and the other was on maternity leave and undecided about her career. The course their careers and personal lives took and their reflections on being a teaching principal in a rural and remote school are outlined below.

Alice

During her second year at the school Alice was successful in applying for relocation to the more populated south east of the state and commenced as a Band 5 teaching principal at that school in the second half of the year. The major reason for her request to relocate was her sense of loneliness and isolation, brought about by the breakup of her long term relationship. In the new area, which was where she had grown up and many of her friends still lived, personal support was available.

Other advantages of being at the new school included being close to regional centres and to Brisbane, which meant she ceased, “living and breathing work” and was able to play sport, go to the gym, and socialise with friends. According to Alice, her happiness had less to do with proximity to business centres and more to do with proximity to old friends. An added bonus of living in a larger community was anonymity and being seen as a person again, “...not me, the principal”.

Three years after commencing at her new school Alice was offered the opportunity to act as a deputy principal at a nearby large school. She enjoyed the role so much she commenced applying for deputy principal roles in other schools, but without success. At
the end of that year she returned to her substantive teaching principal role, but despite positive feelings toward the school, staff and students, the role was, “just so large and cumbersome with little to no recognition”, that she “loathed” being a teaching principal.

Nevertheless, Alice continued as a teaching principal for another year. Six years after commencing as a teaching principal in the small rural and remote school community she accepted a HOC position in a large school, where she also performed deputy principal duties. During that year she also married and she stated that part of her reason for not wanting to work long hours after school or at weekends was the change in her marital status. More recently, Alice advised that she and her husband are expecting the birth of their first child.

Reflecting on her teaching principal experiences in a rural and remote school, Alice stated that she held only fond memories of the people she met and worked with during that period. She drew comparisons between the different lifestyles of rural and city areas and described the rural students as innocent and protected within their small isolated community and family structures. “The social engagement – participating and experiencing in such a different way of life...no experience I have ever had can be imagined by city folk”.

In hindsight, Alice realised she struggled to maintain a focus on teaching, as she was consumed by the administrative aspects of the role which were new to her and added, “Back then, I didn’t know what I didn’t know and my more recent experiences have allowed me to reflect on some ways things could have been improved at [school].” On the topic of mentors, Alice stated that having a mentor from a large school would not have been helpful because, “All of these small schools are so unique and have nothing similar to that of a big school, where these principal mentors hailed from, that their advice was usually unhelpful.”

Alice acknowledged that the combination of the separation from her long term partner, lack of family support and being in an isolated area was not ideal and therefore
Appendix E – Where are they now?

recommended that teaching principals needed supportive family networks, “...the wonderful experiences you have would be better shared with someone else.” She added:

*Band 5 schools are hard work, perhaps you have to work too hard to be successful and the recognition, remuneration, or just plain promotion opportunities were not there. This basically resulted in burn out for me. Slogging it out, keeping my head above water and going nowhere.*

Most importantly, Alice found that “being in the fish bowl of a small community” eroded her enjoyment and she preferred her current school where she was anonymous when she drove away from the school each day.

**Ann**

Half way through Ann’s second year as a teaching principal in a rural and remote school she successfully applied for relocation to a more populated area. She confessed that if her application was not successful she considered either relinquishing the position or resigning from the department. She did not feel she was respected by parents and they either did not speak to her, or argued with her over trivial school matters. The new male graduate, who was appointed as second teacher to the school in her second year, “...joined in one of the social groups with gusto... telling everyone I was picking on him”. Around this time Ann’s husband and other staff told her she appeared to be very sad, “as if someone had died”.

At her new school, Ann reported feeling much happier, was better equipped to handle confrontation, did not receive telephone calls from angry parents at nights or weekends, was not expected to participate in community parties and received positive feedback from the P&C. One of the reasons for her improved mood was proximity to larger regional towns, but the major reason was the improved quality of the accommodation. As this was a factor in Ann’s discontent in her previous community, she happily reported the new house was roomy and well maintained, with a shed for her husband’s hobbies and a sewing room for her. She was able to re-engage with her patchwork and quilting hobby and her stress levels subsequently lowered. The house was also situated in a quiet back street that saw little traffic and provided the privacy missing from the previous rural and remote housing arrangement. However, she reported that the students
were, “more wild” than those in her previous school, with little awareness of social niceties, or of treating each other with respect.

At the end of her second year at the new school Ann decided to relinquish her principal’s position. She advised that after three years as a teaching principal she, “wanted a life again, so I’m downsizing and returning to the classroom.” Despite the new school offering positive parental and staff support and enjoying her time there, she reported extreme tiredness and no longer wished to work 10-12 hour days.

Ann received a transfer as a classroom teacher to a large regional city school where she continues to teach. She reported that as a teacher she now has work life balance, “working to live rather than living to work” and feeling happier with more time to devote to teaching students.

Asked to reflect on her eighteen months as a teaching principal in a rural and remote community, Ann observed that it seemed to have happened a long time ago and that the good memories have taken precedence over the bad. She concluded by stating, “...when I look back, nothing is as bad as it seemed at the time.”

**Eve**

Due to a number of incidences, approval was given for Eve to leave the rural and remote school community at the end of her first year. Three years later she continued to describe the year as “the worst year of my life – the nightmares have finally stopped.” She commenced the following year as a HOC for a cluster of small schools. However, she found the role, “interesting, yet entirely boring” and toward the end of that year reported, “I have decided to leave EQ. I find what we are about is less and less about kids…and I am increasingly frustrated with EQ’s fractured approach to education as a whole.”

Eve successfully applied for one year’s unpaid leave, during which she travelled overseas, completed a contract working with high school students and met the man to
whom she subsequently became engaged to be married. The following year she was offered the opportunity to act as a deputy principal.

Five years after commencing as a teaching principal in a rural and remote school community, Eve set up her own business and resigned from Education Queensland. She advised she was the happiest she had ever been, had commenced a fitness regime and enjoyed a social life where she was not “the boss” and isolated:

*I am finally being true to myself and let go of all of the expectations (self imposed mainly, although common to young female principals) of having to do it all, better than anyone else and more intensely than anyone else.*

Asked to reflect on the year she spent as a teaching principal, Eve’s first response was “The thought of that place still gives me the heebies!” However, she claimed she learned lessons in human nature from the experience and she now approached situations differently including, “I don’t take myself so seriously”. As to the role of teaching principal, Eve stated that the role required she learn many new tasks and “create essentially useless EQ mandated documents”. She claimed to enjoy the administrative aspects of the role, but did not believe Education Queensland provided sufficient support or training to female teaching principals, or educated the communities about their expectations. Furthermore, she believed that as an organisation they were “out of touch” with the challenges faced by teaching principals in small communities where societal changes did not evolve in the same ways as elsewhere. She argued that specialist support should be accessible to beginning principals, as it was unrealistically expected that because principals had learned to teach they could manage unrelated skills such as managing finance, resources and people. However, her primary argument was the expectations of the community and the issue of gender:

*...small school principalling [sic] is not about how well you can run a school – it is how your staff and community felt that their perceptions of your role are being met... every community is different and a hot bed for rumour and judgement. This makes walking into a small school job fraught with unforeseen and unfounded judgement calls – especially if you are a woman...We are not desirable additions to small schools (these communities want males – regardless). The role of principal must evolve.*
Five years after commencing as a teaching principal in a rural and remote school, Eve stated, “I am broke, I live from week to week, and yet – I can’t get the smile off my face...I work longer and harder and for a lot less money and have never been happier...leaving Ed Qld was absolutely the best thing I have ever done.” The following year Eve opened a second branch of her business and was also planning her wedding.

**Heather**

During her second year as a teaching principal in a rural and remote school, Heather began applying to schools in more preferred areas. She was good friends with the second teacher at the school, but decided, “for my own sanity”, that she needed to move to further her career. She was eventually offered a “sideways” relocation to another Band 6 school in the south-east corner of the state.

The enrolment at her new school was three times the number of the previous school and the students were more challenging, but Heather reported being happier as help or advice were available from district office staff and there were greater opportunities to attend professional development. She was also excited that the students’ parents gave positive feedback and, “I’ve not had one single parent swear at me”.

After relocating, Heather made the decision that work would no longer be her life and devised a healthy lifestyle plan, the result of which was that less than eighteen months later she lost more than 50kg in weight. She also ceased taking work home and became involved in social activities. In the second year in her new school Heather met the man who later became her husband.

Heather continued to seek deputy principal roles as she admitted she was:

> Tired of being the one in charge and having to take on every role – manager, professional development organiser, data analyser, guidance officer, first aider, head of curriculum, behaviour management specialist, etc.

Although a deputy principal role was not forthcoming, five years after commencing as a teaching principal Heather was offered the opportunity to co-ordinate a regional project for aspiring principals.
In contemplating the changes in her life, Heather stated that what she most enjoyed about her present school was the anonymity of living thirty minutes from the school and avoiding the “fishbowl living”.

_Iris_

During Iris’s third year as a teaching principal in a rural and remote small school community she unsuccessfully began seeking promotional positions. She advised that she was experiencing ongoing issues with the workload and consequently her health was suffering. “I love my job but it is becoming increasingly obvious that EQ requires the impossible.” She was “disillusioned” by the lack of communication from regional and central office personnel and found that while they were demanding, they did not respond to her requests for support.

In the first half of her fourth year in the role Iris accessed long service leave and returned to the role, “feeling great and refreshed.” Although she continued to find the workload “mountainous and overwhelming”, she believed taking leave allowed her to re-energise and manage more effectively. She added, “Now the ‘I don’t know what I don’t know’ pile has reduced considerably, it is easier to be more proactive, rather than always on the back foot.” However, during the fourth term of the same year Iris submitted her notice to retire at the end of year. She did not maintain contact.

_Janice_

Janice did not maintain contact after her first year as a teaching principal. Education Queensland data base indicated that she retired during her second year as a teaching principal.

_Jill_

As noted earlier, Jill was removed from the school at the end of her first year while an investigation was undertaken. She workshadowed a principal in a higher band school and later acted as a deputy principal. Due to the stress of the investigation and the length of time it took to reach resolution, she experienced stress and weight gain.
Three years after commencing as a teaching principal in the rural and remote school, the allegations against Jill were dismissed and she was transferred to another school to act as deputy principal. However, the stress from the lengthy investigation impacted on her physical health and she required hospitalisation and later surgery.

The following year Jill relinquished her teaching principal role and was appointed as a substantive deputy principal. However, the stress of the preceding years led to a breakdown of her marriage and an acrimonious divorce. Five years after commencing as a teaching principal in the rural and remote school her physical condition had not improved and her recovery was hindered by a diagnosis of depression, but she continued to function as a deputy principal in a large school.

Asked to reflect on her experiences as a teaching principal in the small school community, Jill stated that her memories were surprisingly good and that she had “blanked out” the bad memories to protect herself from the pain and sorrow. She believed the alienation was so complete that she rarely acknowledged she was ever principal at that school, “I simply leave that year out!”

In hindsight, Jill believed she should have learned the strengths and weaknesses of staff by becoming better acquainted with them, “…keep your friends close, but your enemies closer.” She believed that by building relationships she could have instigated “those fierce conversations”. She also determined she should have insisted on a financial audit of the school when she first started and ensured the budget was explained to the administrative assistant, who worked at the school for several years and was entrenched in her methods. Finally, Jill believed she should have been more direct about her expectations; ensured the communication channels remained open; and acknowledged staff in the way they found acceptable. Her advice to aspiring teaching principals was to, “keep your rose-coloured glasses firmly on!”

Nan

Nan relinquished the teaching principal role part way through her first year, but remained until its end. The following year she commenced as a classroom teacher, but
acknowledged that her year’s experience as a teaching principal had been, “rewarding, but challenging” and she learned a great deal about how schools operated. However, she was re-evaluating her career and considering leaving education and applying to another government department that worked with children, “I want to make a difference in another way”.

Nevertheless, Nan continued classroom teaching the following year and eventually transferred to a large regional city. She advised she was disillusioned with Education Queensland, because despite making it known that she relinquished the teaching principal role due to her opposition to “prep” year, when she was appointed to a new school she was assigned a “prep” year class. “I am looking at getting out of teaching as I don’t feel that EQ appreciates teachers who do the right thing for them”.

Five years after commencing as a teaching principal in a rural and remote school Nan reported that she was teaching Year 7 in a large school in a regional city and, “…love being in the classroom”. However, she was also working with the principal on implementing new programmes into the school and the principal was encouraging her to apply for acting principal positions. At the beginning of the sixth year she advised she had been offered some acting principal roles, but declined the offers as she enjoyed teaching too much. Nevertheless, she was considering applying to return to a rural and remote school as she was, “Not a city girl.”

Asked to reflect on her year as a teaching principal, Nan responded that her predominant memories were of learning how a school operated; managing staff; and teaching multi age; but most of all, “…how difficult it could be living and working on site and being on call 24/7 by parents.” In hindsight, she did not believe she would do anything differently if she was to undertake the role again, as she enjoyed the experience, despite it being difficult at times. She observed, “I would still be doing it if EQ hadn’t brought in prep.”

**Natalie**

Natalie completed three years as a teaching principal in the rural and remote school community and despite it being “hectic” with normal teaching expectations and
national testing, stated she was, “...enjoying every minute of it!” During her third year as teaching principal she met and married a man who worked in the local community and who came from a rural background.

Toward the end of her fourth year she was granted maternity leave and her first child was born early the next year, with a second child born eighteen months later. Because her husband’s work took them to various rural communities, Natalie was undecided about her future career. She remained the substantive principal for the rural and remote school, but was unlikely to return to it and therefore would be required to relinquish the position. She did not believe it was possible to balance her young family and the demanding work of a teaching principal.

Asked to reflect on her four years as a teaching principal in the same school, Natalie stated that she enjoyed the role and the community. She believed that having a country background was an asset to working in rural and remote communities, along with having a passion for working with children.

**Nina**

Nina acted in the role of teaching principal for one year but determined during the year that she did not enjoy the isolation of rural living and did not apply for the permanent position when it became available. Instead, she successfully applied for a HOC position in the south east of the state and remained in that position for the next five years with occasional acting deputy principal roles. She made no contact during the five years following her participation in this study.

**Sally**

Sally completed the requisite two years as a teaching principal in the rural and remote school before applying for relocation to a more populated area. She had earlier completed two years as a teacher in a remote area and believed that after four years the time was right to, “go home.” She stated she enjoyed being a teaching principal for two years and that it provided a “huge learning experience”. At the beginning of her third year she was offered relocation close to her home town. Although there were less than
sixteen students at her new school, unlike her previous school, Sally was permitted one
day each week to complete administrative duties. However, she stated she, “...would not
rule out heading back out west, after spending some quality time with family.” Sally
remained at that school as a teaching principal for four years, during which time the
student numbers doubled and a second teacher was appointed.

Six years after commencing as a teaching principal in a rural and remote school, Sally
successfully applied for promotion to a Band 6 school, where she taught three days each
week and completed administrative tasks on the remaining two days. She stated she
held no ambition to be principal of a higher band school as she enjoyed teaching and
she enjoyed the opportunities presented to develop her leadership skills.

Asked to reflect on her experience as a teaching principal for two years in a rural and
remote area, Sally observed that those years influenced her decision to continue as a
teaching principal, “I feel that I developed both skills and a love of relational leadership
in [school] and learnt what it means to be an important part of the community.” She
continued to maintain contact with staff from the rural and remote community and was
undertaking a mentoring role with an indigenous student from that area.
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