DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 975 RC 022 422

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TITLE	School Contribution to Rural Communities: Leadership Issues. CRLRA Discussion Paper Series.
INSTITUTION	Tasmania Univ., Launceston (Australia). Center for Research and Learning in Regional Australia.
REPORT NO	D1/2000
ISSN	ISSN-1440-480X
PUB DATE	2000-01-00
NOTE	31p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.crlra.utas.edu.au/discuss00.html.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; *Community Involvement; *Community Leaders; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Leadership Qualities; *Participative Decision Making; Rural Development; *Rural Schools; *School Community Relationship; Social Networks
IDENTIFIERS	Australia (Tasmania); Sense of Community; *Social Capital

ABSTRACT

A case study exploring the relationship between local leadership and the school-community partnership was conducted in a small, isolated Australian mining town. Data were generated from written materials such as the local newspaper and interviews with 8 school staff members and 11 community members involved with the schools or representing business, industry, and state and local government interests in the town. The major school-based interactions with the community were fundraising activities, sporting activities, cultural activities, and informal and formal community involvement in school operations and management. The study identified indicators of the effectiveness of school-community partnerships: a strong commitment to the partnership from school and community leaders; a high level of cohesiveness within the schools; wide-ranging and ongoing involvement by community members in all aspects of the school's organization and management; wide-ranging and ongoing involvement of students and school staff in community activities; and a strong sense of ownership of the school by the community. Findings indicate that leadership that enhances the school-community partnership actively engages in relationship building; facilitates two-way communication; strongly supports the involvement of varied community members in ongoing activities, as well as planning and decision making; and supports both a philosophy and practice of shared leadership. (Contains 49 references.) (TD)

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School contribution to rural communities: Leadership issues

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Discussion Paper D1/2000

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CRLRA Discussion Paper Series
ISSN 1440-480X

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL TRAINING

SCHOOL CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL COMMUNITIES: LEADERSHIP ISSUES

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Abstract

Successful rural community development efforts focus on harnessing the resources already present to find community solutions to community concerns. For these efforts to be successful, high levels of cooperation, communication and trust need to be built within the community. This paper is based on a pilot study which investigated the role of the local school(s) in the process. The study found that not only do schools educate youth, but they perform a myriad of other functions within their communities, from providing physical resources such as facilities and equipment, to involving community members in the academic, sporting and cultural activities of the school, to encouraging youth and community members to work together to develop a greater understanding of their community and its potential. As school and community work and learn together, relationships are built and strengthened, and networks, extending into and beyond the community, are established.

The study also investigated those factors which influence the nature and extent of a school's contribution to its community, and found that leadership, both within the school and in the wider community, is central to the school-community partnership. A leadership philosophy which supports community participation and shared decision making ensures that relevant solutions are found to meet local community needs. This philosophy is based on the importance of relationship building and establishing networks. Community leadership processes which harness and develop existing school-community relationships and networks are therefore laying a solid foundation for rural community sustainability.

Acknowledgment

The authors acknowledge the input of Dr Pam Bishop into the design of this study.

© January 2000

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Introduction

Over the last decade, numerous factors and trends have been affecting rural communities[1], often adversely. In particular:

> [l]ow population density and geographical isolation have made rural communities especially vulnerable to the economic, social and environmental trends emerging from the nation's move away from local manufacturing and resource based industries, toward a multi-national, global economy. Mining, logging, agriculture, and manufacturing, once robust industries in rural [areas] ... have come to a near standstill, leaving high rates of unemployment with attendant problems of social and economic distress ... (Miller 1995, pp. 1–2).

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

Literature review

This study was informed by literature from three broad fields of research and practice: rural education, community development, and leadership. It draws on the growing body of literature on social capital within schools and communities, with particular reference to the role of educational and community leadership in building social capital.

Community development and social capital

Social capital refers to interactions between people which lead to the development of social networks 'that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' (Putnam 1993, p. 167). Social capital can be held by any organisation of people, such as a family, a school, or a community (Coleman 1988). Recent community development literature suggests the way rural communities manage change is influenced by the level of social capital within the community; that is, by the strength of linkages and interrelationships between community members (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Holladay 1992). Through these social networks, stores of social capital are built which contribute to the community's social wellbeing and social

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[1] For the purposes of this study, *rural* is defined in its broadest sense to mean regional or non-metropolitan areas. *Communities* are clusterings of people with shared patterns of living, who have common interests and problems. Communities are built around relationships, and the quality of these relationships is demonstrated by the way people communicate, support each other and solve problems together (Hough & Paine 1997). *Rural communities* are therefore defined as geographic clusterings of people in regional or non-metropolitan areas who interact to share common interests, solve common problems, and support each other.

cohesion (Falk 1998). Research also notes that the quantity and quality of interactions between individual and institutional players in communities influence the social and economic outcomes of those communities (Kilpatrick, Bell & Falk 1999; Falk, Harrison & Kilpatrick 1998; Kilpatrick & Bell 1998). The quality of interactions can be measured by such factors as their degree of externality, historicity and futuricity, trust, and shared values and norms (Falk & Kilpatrick 1998).

A number of these studies have also outlined factors which positively influence community development. These factors include: providing opportunities for building community confidence; encouraging community participation and consensus decision making; developing and communicating a shared community vision; encouraging risk taking to achieve the vision; encouraging local leadership in which all community members, including youth and those new to the community, are encouraged to participate; forging links external to the community, and celebrating 'good news stories' and successes through the local media (Kenyon 1999; Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). What these factors have in common is their focus on building and sustaining relationships within and external to the community, in order to develop social cohesiveness, wellbeing and trust.

There is a positive relationship between the level of social capital within a community and the community's perceptions of its schools (Putnam 1995). Vibrant rural communities reflect a strong presence of traditional institutions, actively encourage young people into leadership roles, and are strong believers in and supporters of local education opportunities (Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). In these communities the school, as both a tangible and symbolic focal point of the community, is likely to play an important role in the generation of social capital.

Schools and social capital

The level of social capital generated by schools plays an important role in community development. Schools provide youth with access to social networks through which resources, opportunities and privileges in society are obtained. It is these networks of support, which are provided by institutional agents such as teachers, school counsellors and community leaders (Stanton-Salazar 1997), that contribute to positive youth and community outcomes in terms of educational attainment and social equality. Research reports that the level of social capital within the family and particularly within the school, is the chief determinant of educational attainment, rather than the human (educational) or financial capital of the family (Teachman, Paasch & Carver 1997). Conversely, a decline in school and community social capital leads to an increase in student dropout rates from high school. As the foundations for civic engagement, or social capital, are laid in the high school years, an increased student dropout rate is likely to contribute to a further decline in community social capital (Putnam 1995).

Youth development, and the active involvement of youth in the community, is one of the key ingredients in creating successful rural communities (Kenyon

1999; Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). The key focus of social capital generated by schools is on the development of youth. However, in the process of developing youth, rural schools contribute far more widely to the development of social capital within their communities. They are often one of the key players in community development.

The contribution of schools to the economic and social development of their communities is not a new concept, as evidenced, for example, by the growth in North America of community schools in the 1940s and 1950s, and of community education in the 1970s (Boles & Seay 1974). Recent decades have seen a growing body of literature on the contribution of rural schools to community survival and growth (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Jolly & Deloney 1996; Miller 1995; Nachtigal 1994; Nunn 1994; Glen et al. 1992; Squires & Sinclair 1990).

Rural schools, as a tangible and symbolic focal point for the community, play an important role in the educational, economic and social development of their communities (Glen et al. 1992). Of particular importance is their potential to generate social capital, particularly in communities where the level of family and community social capital is low (Jolly & Deloney 1996), although in many communities this potential is still to be fully realised (Miller 1995; Combs & Bailey 1992). Evidence suggests that many small rural communities have failed to remain viable after losing their school (Jolly & Deloney 1996; Bowie 1994).

Miller (1995; 1991) described the contribution of rural schools to community social capital as a partnership consisting of three inter-related components: school as a community centre; community as curriculum, and school-based enterprise. This framework has been adopted by other researchers (for example, Glen et al. 1992). Each of Miller's three components

> reflects learning opportunities and experiences that cross boundaries which have traditionally separated the community as a place of learning from the school ... [T]he value of these community-based learning experiences are the long-term benefits of leadership development, a renewed sense of civic responsibility, and a revitalized sense of community (Miller 1995, pp. 4 & 5).

Other researchers have also documented the ways in which rural schools contribute to their communities. For example, the University of Missouri Extension (1996) documented a number of strategies for enhancing community social capital which focused on increasing school-community links. These strategies included local businesses and government agencies working with the school system to offer opportunities to youth for career exploration and mentorship; basing the school curriculum around community issues, and expanding community organisations such as sports clubs to provide youth with more opportunities for positive relationships with adults. Lane and Dorfman (1997) identified three important outcomes of the school-community partnership: the provision of learning which is contextualised and which encourages authentic engagement of students with their community; the transmission of community culture (norms), and the forging of

intergenerational links by opening school facilities to the community and by encouraging community involvement in school programs.

What each of these researchers highlight is the importance of building and sustaining relationships between school and community through a variety of essentially similar strategies. Miller's (1995; 1991) broad framework is likely to provide a useful tool for closer examination of the educational, economic and social contributions of rural schools to their communities. Let us examine each component in turn.

School as a community centre

Rural schools are often the social and cultural focal point for the community (Glen et al. 1992). Networks are built and maintained through a variety of informal and formal school-community interactions, including: sharing of physical and human resources between school and community (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Nunn 1994; Squires & Sinclair 1990); community involvement in school cultural, sporting and other social activities (Miller 1995; Nunn 1994; Squires & Sinclair 1990); community involvement in education and management-related school activities, and contribution to lifelong learning opportunities by meeting some of the further education and training needs of the community (Glen et al. 1992). Each of these interactions is an important form of community social interaction, particularly for those who are marginalised, such as the unemployed (Limerick & Nielsen 1995). Other opportunities for building and maintaining networks include school delivery of community services such as health and social security (Everson cited in Miller 1995; Boyd 1997; Nunn 1994), and the creation of local employment opportunities by the school (Nunn 1994; Squires & Sinclair 1990).

Community development literature notes that evidence of community pride and identity is a key contributing factor to a vibrant rural community (Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). Rural schools contribute to the community's sense of identity and pride, by representing local history and tradition (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Nunn 1994; Glen et al. 1992) and by transmitting community culture (Lane & Dorfman 1997). In those rural communities under threat due to erosion of services, the school, as well as being the most stable institution in town, symbolises the identity and survival of the whole district (Glen et al. 1992).

Community as curriculum

Nachtigal (1994) cautions that 'what rural schools have done best is prepare students to leave rural communities, either to continue their education and/or find employment' (p. 145). He emphasises the importance of using the community as the curriculum source; when education is taken outside the classroom, barriers between school and community are broken down as students learn within and about their community.

The literature cites a number of examples of successful rural school programs in which networks between school and community have been built by using the community-as-curriculum approach (see, for example, PACERS Small School Cooperative 1998; Miller 1995; Nachtigal 1994; the Denali Project cited in Sergiovanni 1994; Glen et al. 1992; Urch 1990). These examples fall into two main categories: students in collaboration with community members research their community's past and document its history in order to preserve their heritage and future (PACERS Small Schools Cooperative 1998; Miller 1995; Glen et al. 1992), and students identify issues affecting their community and undertake action learning in collaboration with community organisations in order to assess community needs and to plan and implement change (Miller 1995; Squires & Sinclair 1990). The links established between schools and businesses within the community through the provision of further education and training, and pre-employment programs for youth, also contribute to the community by improving the work skills and employment prospects of youth (Glen et al. 1992). The community-as-curriculum approach is a significant contributor to community revitalisation because of the strong links forged between school and community. In addition, the social and economic outcomes and benefits of many community-as-curriculum projects last long after the original project has ended (see, for example, Miller 1995; Glen et al. 1992; Urch 1990).

School-based enterprise

School-based enterprise initiatives focus on developing entrepreneurial skills amongst youth, who work with community members to identify a community need and to develop a product or service to meet that need (Miller 1995). These activities provide students with academic and experiential opportunities in addition to producing a service that will enhance and sustain the community (PACERS Small Schools Cooperative 1998). They also have the potential to provide employment to youth (Miller 1995; Nachtigal 1994). Examples of school-based enterprises established to meet community needs include the establishment of a child daycare centre, a delicatessen and a specialist bakery producing old world breads (Miller 1995; Nachtigal 1994). Glen et al. (1992) document a dairy farm project in a rural Australian school, which contributes to the local economy, and provides students with the opportunity to gain relevant farming and entrepreneurial skills.

Factors which enhance schools' contributions to their rural communities

Successful school-community partnerships are a two-way process, in which a symbiotic relationship is created between a school and its community (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Jolly & Deloney 1996; Squires & Sinclair 1990). The literature identifies a number of factors which have been found to enhance this relationship; of these factors, the role of school and community leadership has been found to be critical in determining the success of school-community development alliances (Miller 1998; Combs & Bailey 1992). Leadership will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Other factors which enhance school contribution to rural communities include the strength of the wider community in terms of civic spirit and vitality (Matthews 1996) and the sense of shared community within the school Boyd (1997). Schools with a shared sense of community have shared beliefs and values, a sense of commonality regarding activities and traditions, a 'caring' ethic (Bryk & Driscoll cited in Boyd, 1997), and provide opportunities for intergenerational contact (Jolly & Deloney 1996). The development of a strong community support base also is an important factor contributing to successful school-community alliances (Miller 1995); such support includes the commitment by schools and communities of sufficient resources to the partnership in terms of time, money and expertise (Miller 1998). The strength of community support is influenced by the community's perceptions of the importance of education and the local school system and the flow of communication between school and community (Combs & Bailey 1992).

Other factors which positively influence rural schools' contributions to their communities include: engagement of teachers and students in community-based learning experiences which are closely related to community development activities; demonstration and publicity of results of school-community projects on a continuing basis (Miller 1995); size of the school (Jolly & Deloney 1996; Combs & Bailey 1992); size of the community, and proximity of the school to the community (Combs & Bailey 1992). Nachtigal (1994) also noted that a school's contribution to its rural community is enhanced if several neighbouring schools and communities are simultaneously involved in the development of school-community alliances. By developing networks each school and community benefits from moral support, as well as from knowledge gained from the successes and failures in other communities.

Many of these factors are indicators of the level of social capital within the school and the community; they have also been documented as factors which contribute to the sustainability of rural communities (Kenyon 1999; Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987).

Leadership

The sustainability of rural communities depends on the ability of local people to find solutions to local problems (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Sorensen & Epps 1996; Murray & Dunn 1995; Miller 1995). Communities with the increased prospects for sustainability are those which focus on the continual development and renewal of local leadership (Kenyon 1999; Peirce & Johnson 1997; Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). The literature sees leadership as an integral component of the school-community partnership for two reasons: the effectiveness of the partnership is dependent on the nature and extent of leadership within the school/community (Miller 1998; Combs & Bailey 1992), while the partnership itself provides leadership development opportunities for community members, particularly for youth (Miller 1995).

The changing nature of leadership

As the world becomes more complex in terms of globalisation of the economy and the need to keep pace with rapid and continual change, the old industrial paradigm of leadership based on a mechanistic (or leader-centred) world view is no longer appropriate. It is argued that a major limitation of leader-centred leadership is the inability of a small number of designated leaders to meet individual and group needs (Dyer & Williams 1987).

The new leadership paradigm for the 21st century is a leadership of empowerment which involves the whole group in the decisionmaking process, not just those who are designated as leaders (Rogers 1997; Dyer & Williams 1987). Although greater time is taken to reach decisions, group members are more likely to support decisions reached through a shared leadership process because they have a sense ownership of them (Dyer & Williams 1987). The new leadership is therefore based on building relationships of mutual obligation and trust between leaders and collaborators (Falk & Mulford forthcoming; Lane & Dorfman 1997; Peirce & Johnson 1997; Rogers 1997); in short, its focus is on fostering social capital (Falk 1998). Falk and Mulford (forthcoming) describe this new form of leadership as 'enabling leadership', because it focuses on the situation that leaders must enable, unlike earlier models of leadership which focused on 'the leader'.

Leadership within communities and schools

The generation of social capital, along with economic capital, is an important tool in community development (Falk 1998; Lane & Dorfman 1997; Miller 1995). Local community leadership which encourages civic involvement by all, is seen as likely to foster high levels of social capital (Peirce & Johnson 1997; Putnam 1993). For example, a positive relationship has been found between community viability and female participation in leadership (Kenyon 1999; O'Brien et al. cited in Sorensen & Epps 1996; Heartland Centre for Leadership Development 1986), as well as between community viability and youth participation in leadership (Miller 1998; Holladay 1992).

Leadership is a process which is based on people and relationships, rather than on structure (Peirce & Johnson 1997). The effectiveness of this process is determined by the quality of relationships or networks within the community and external to the community (Falk & Mulford forthcoming; Flora & Flora 1993). Effective community leadership is based on the formation of institutional partnerships with a commitment to developing local leadership. Institutional partners include, but are not restricted to, Chambers of Commerce, business and industry, schools, churches and government entities (Raftery 1993). Local leaders may be, but are not necessarily, drawn from some or all of these groups; the balance differs from community to community (Sorensen & Epps 1996). The type and extent of leadership required will depend on the location and its particular needs and planned outcomes (Falk 1998). Effective community and school leadership will therefore be situational, in that different group members will take on leadership roles at different times, according to the situation (Miller 1998; Hough & Paine 1997;

Sergiovanni 1994; Squires & Sinclair 1990). Situational leaders are those whom the group recognises as having the appropriate know-how, although they may or may not hold a designated leadership position. Their role is to act as facilitators as the group develops plans to meet its needs (Dyer & Williams 1987).

The leadership process consists of articulating common purpose or community vision, initiating interest and commitment to the vision, and encouraging community involvement and participation in achieving the vision (Sorensen & Epps 1996). Communities which engage successfully in these activities are more likely to ensure their long-term sustainability (Kenyon 1999; Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). This is because the strength of the leadership process is the 'networks of responsibility drawn from all segments, coming together to create a wholeness that incorporates diversity' (Peirce & Johnson 1997, p. 7). A leadership process which includes all community members ensures that relevant local solutions can be found to community problems (Falk 1998). However, it is the process of relationship building that is important, rather than success in producing the intended outcomes (Rost cited in Pigg 1996). This highlights the difference between leadership and management, which focuses on implementation of plans and strategies (Pigg 1996). Although both are a necessary component of community development, it is suggested that community leadership development programs in the past have focused too much on management issues rather than on relationships and purpose (Pigg 1996).

While there seems to be no set of universal characteristics which define successful leaders, the literature suggests that they are likely to be skilled in communication, building trust and empowering others, and in collaborative goal setting and problem solving (Hough & Paine 1997; Bishop & Mulford 1996; Rosenblum cited in Mulford 1996; Combs & Bailey 1992; Holladay 1992). Group members are more likely to accept leaders who: personally approach them to join a group; make them feel comfortable in the group; explain their responsibilities to them; are honest, and display faith and confidence in group members (Dyer & Williams 1987). Writing on educational leadership, Leithwood et al. (cited in Mulford 1996) noted that the vision-creating and goal consensus-building practices of school leaders strongly influenced commitment by school staff. However, vision and innovation may need to be balanced with an understanding of the importance of maintaining established values and traditions (Hough & Paine 1997). Intelligence, knowledge and the ability to see the big picture, along with the strength of the leader's networks, particularly their links with the outside world, are also listed as important attributes of leaders (Sorensen & Epps 1996).

Leadership which enhances school contribution to rural communities

Leadership significantly influences the success of school-community alliances (Miller 1998; Combs & Bailey 1992). Communities with a participatory approach to community decisionmaking, a cooperative community spirit, and which demonstrate deliberate transition of power to a younger generation of

leaders (Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987) are likely to welcome and foster school-community interaction. These communities recognise the need to replenish and re-energise community leadership on an ongoing basis, hence the importance of including youth in community decisionmaking (Miller 1995: Holladay 1992). Miller (1995) notes that the success of community-based learning initiatives is influenced heavily by aspects of both school and wider community leadership. Communities which value the contribution of their local schools are likely to display a number of the following characteristics: active involvement and empowerment of youth at both the school and community level; broad-based school and community support for community change; a common school and community vision for the future; emphasis on group process and team effort within the school and the wider community; awareness of the community's needs, strengths and successes; encouragement of local leadership, and the development of effective relationships and networks within the community in order to create a safe climate for change. A number of these areas have also been identified by researchers into educational and community leadership (see, for example, Jolly & Deloney 1996; Mulford 1996).

The success of collaboration between the school and other community agencies is also influenced by the culture of the school. School culture is, in turn, influenced by the school leader's interactions with others (Head 1998) and his/her ability to negotiate and balance these relationships (Goldring 1993). School leaders who adopt a democratic style of leadership, which seeks input from staff, parents and community members (Boyd 1997), are likely to encourage a sense of ownership of their schools. Professional development programs for school leaders both in Australia and overseas are increasingly recognising the importance of leadership based around shared school ownership (see, for example, Urch 1990). Such leaders are likely to have multiple linkages within the community, in terms of their own membership of a variety of community organisations, and in terms of actively fostering relationships between the school and other community groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, industry, and local council. Effective school leaders are skilled in harnessing the community and available resources, and in using the curriculum programs to connect the school with some of the more diverse elements of the community (Rotary Club of Heirisson 1998). This interaction results in the implementation of school practices and policies which reflect the interests and needs of the whole community (Squires & Sinclair 1990). Failure to involve stakeholders results in lack of ownership of the school by the community (Bishop & Mulford 1996), thus reducing the capacity for the school to contribute to the community.

Summary

Rural schools play a vital role in strengthening linkages within their communities, by providing opportunities for interaction and networking, which contribute to the community's wellbeing and social cohesion. The close links between the survival and development of rural schools and their communities are demonstrated by a number of researchers (Jolly & Deloney

1996; Bowie 1994), who provide evidence that many rural communities have failed to remain viable after losing their school. Broadly, there are three inter-related components of the school-community partnership: school as community centre; community as curriculum, and school-based enterprise (Miller 1995; 1991). Of the many factors which influence the success of the school-community partnership, leadership plays a central role. Schools' contributions to rural communities are enhanced by a leadership process which emphasises active involvement and empowerment of youth at both the school and community level, broad-based school and community support for community change, and a common school and community vision for the future (Miller 1995). Effective leadership for the 21st century, whether in communities, schools or other organisations, is shared and participatory, and is based on the quality of relationships within and external to the community (Peirce & Johnson 1997; Lane & Dorfman 1997; Dyer & Williams 1987). The nature of school leadership is central to the school-community alliance. Such partnerships are enhanced by school leaders who have multiple linkages within the community, are skilled in harnessing community resources, and who have the vision to connect the school and wider community through curriculum programs (Rotary Club of Heirisson 1998).

Case Study: A small Australian mining town

With this body of literature as a background, a small study was undertaken in an isolated Australian mining town. The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate and document the nature and extent of school contributions to that particular community, and to undertake an initial exploration into the way in which school and community leadership influences the nature and extent of school contributions to the community. This section of the paper outlines the methodology used, presents and discusses the key findings from the study, and concludes by identifying some indicators of effective school-community partnerships, and of effective school and community leadership which enhances the school-community partnership.

Methodology

In order to explore the relationship between leadership and the school-community partnership, a case study methodology based on qualitative research was used. A case study approach is recommended for pilot studies such as this, because it focuses on a bounded entity, in this case a small community of approximately 2600 people (ABS 1998). By using a case study approach, data is gained through a process of discovery rather than confirmation. The resulting data is both intensive and rich, and able to be considered within its environmental context (Burns 1997).

The community selected for study is similar to a number of other established mining towns in Australia, in that the mine has sustained this particular town for the past century, and in the past has been heavily involved in all aspects of the community's social and economic development. Following financial

difficulties some five years ago, the mining company significantly reduced its workforce. Since then there have been two changes in mine ownership. With the reduction in employment opportunities, and economic uncertainty surrounding the future of the mine, many families left the town in search of employment elsewhere. Government and other services, such as banks, began to gradually disappear. There was a sharp decline in school enrolments, in each of the town's three schools: the government primary and high schools, and the Catholic primary school. It has become obvious to community leaders in recent years that other forms of economic activity needed to be generated in order to ensure the sustainability of the town and the surrounding areas, and to reduce the town's dependence on the mining industry. The potential of tourism has been recognised, with its focus on the region's history and unique natural environment. A major community focus at present is the establishment of a tourism project which has strong support from the Federal and State governments, as well as local and State entrepreneurs, and the local community.

In keeping with the case study methodology (Burns 1997), data were collected from two sources: semi-structured interviews with school staff and other community members, and written documentation in the form of the local newspaper, school newsletters and minutes of Parents' Association and School Council meetings. A total of 19 community members were interviewed. Eight were school staff: two each from the government primary and Catholic primary schools, and four from the government high school. In addition, 11 community members were interviewed, five of whom were involved with at least one of the schools in some way, and six of whom were not. Community members without school involvement were selected to represent business, industry and both State and local government interests within the town. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Interview transcripts were analysed for themes which emerged from the data. Themes were grouped into two broad categories to answer the two research questions:

- What is the nature and extent of the contribution of rural schools to their community's development, beyond traditional forms of education of young people?
- How does school and community leadership influence the nature and extent of school contributions to the community?

Data analysis was validated through a process of triangulation, involving researcher checks with interviewees, and cross reference to written documentation collected (Burns 1997). The consistency of themes was then verified with the existing literature.

Findings

The key findings from the study are presented under the following subheadings: the schools' contributions to their community: an overview; ongoing catalysts for school-community interaction; other school-based

interactions and their outcomes, and leadership and other factors which influence schools' contributions to the community.

The schools' contributions to their community: an overview

The educational contribution of schools to the youth of this community is an assumption of this study. However, there is also a good deal of evidence within the data that the three schools in this town traditionally have been, and continue to be, a focal point for the community. For example, the schools share their physical resources with other schools and community groups. They provide a pool of expertise amongst staff, some of whom contribute to the community by sharing their skills and experience in areas such as sport and music. The schools participate regularly in significant community events such as Anzac Day, and are involved in charitable works, particularly with the elderly within the community. Each of the schools provides a variety of informal and formal opportunities for community members to participate in school operation and management. They also provide a wide range of social, cultural and sporting opportunities for students and community members. In addition, the schools contribute to the economy by using the services of local businesses wherever possible, and by providing direct employment for a number of local people.

There is some evidence of further school-community interaction being stimulated as schools attempt to contextualise the curriculum to their own community. Examples include high school students and a local community group working together to design a Web page for a new tourist venture, as well as the relatively recent introduction of a VET-in-schools program into the high school, with modules in retail, engineering, clerical and hospitality fields. These initiatives are in the early stages of development, but two interviewees indicated that educational and community leaders had begun to recognise the 'huge possibilities' of ongoing contextualised learning in terms of community development. For example, discussions between the local council, the project management team of the new tourist venture, the high school Principal, and an Education Department Superintendent external to the community, have given rise to the creation of an Education Officer position whose brief will be to *'get the schools very involved in the [tourist venture] ... at a curriculum level'* (Participant 3).

Ongoing catalysts for school-community interaction

School-based interactions, through which relationships are built with others in the community, and networks are established and maintained, revolved around four major ongoing school activities: fundraising for the school and for local charities; sporting activities; cultural activities, and informal and formal community involvement in school operation and management. As in a number of mining towns, there is a long established tradition of generous financial support of community (including school) activities by the mining company and local businesses. A number of participants believed that the interactions between school and community brought about by fundraising were as important, if not more important, to community cohesion than the

opportunities for interaction provided by school involvement in other activities, such as community service.

Sport is an important focus in a community where there were few other recreational activities available. It is also an important catalyst for social interaction. Schools contributed to sport in several ways: by involving community members in school sporting activities; by actively encouraging students to participate in community sporting groups, and by making school sporting facilities available to the public. In addition, some school staff members were involved in the management of the management of sporting groups, such as the swimming club, in which students from all three schools participated. One of the strengths of the swimming club was its cohesiveness. The ability to work together to achieve a common goal is illustrated in the following extract:

> *We have a council swimming pool and the council tried to cut it [operating time] short by four weeks so the swimming club is like a small group, about 35 or 40 members, and they fought to get their extra weeks ...* (Participant 8)

School cultural events and celebrations were important catalysts in building and strengthening networks both within and external to the community, and in affirming a sense of community identity. The following extracts highlight the important community outcomes of the high school's winning entry in a national music and drama competition. The production was supported strongly by the immediate community and by other communities in the region. Interviewees described how the process of preparing for the production provided countless opportunities for interaction and networking between community members which may not otherwise have happened. They also described how the theme of the production symbolised the fighting spirit of the community in the face of economic uncertainty:

> *When they won ... that was wonderful ... the amount of faxes that we got from the whole [area]... just wishing everybody well ... it was really really wonderful. The local radio station announced it as soon as we won, and when the kids came back they had the lap of honour at the local football game for them ... it really brings the community together, the things that they [the schools] do.* (Participant 9)

> *And the whole community was just a buzz because just at that time, and this was also mentioned in [the production], was the closing of the mine, and that was its [the production's] whole theme, that [the community] will continue to live.* (Participant 7)

The recent centenary celebration of the Catholic school was important in allowing the whole community to reflect on and celebrate its uniqueness. It also demonstrated the depth of relationships within the community, and the school's role in developing and fostering those relationships:

> *... it involved the wider community not just those involved with the centenary ... I think they were just excited, that this was happening, well because so many people came back and ... they just appreciate the value of the school to their community ... and they were all coming home ... this was something worth coming home for ... anyone who has been here in [this community] they actually wear it like a red badge of honour that they have actually served their time [here] ...* (Participant 6)

Each of the schools provided both informal and formal opportunities for community involvement, from parent help in the classroom and canteen, to

membership of the Parents' Association and School Council or Board of Management. In each school, Principals actively encouraged community involvement and participation in decisionmaking. One parent, speaking of the benefits of community involvement in the school, notes how participation in the Parents' Association built understanding and trust between school and community:

> *I understood much better the teachers' problems ... there must be a support thing, the understanding between the parents and the school staff and the understanding of each other's problems ... so I think we all benefit really ...* (Participant 12)

Other parents outlined the importance of lifelong learning opportunities provided by school involvement. They reported how they had gained new skills, knowledge and attitudes in a number of areas, such as communication, negotiation, and working in groups. Individual benefits of community involvement in the school included empowerment through increased confidence, knowledge and skills, while benefits to the school and the wider community included increased levels of teamwork and collective action, as well as opportunities for the development of leadership potential. The following parent notes the personal benefits of both informal and formal participation in the primary school:

> *I have learnt just so much, even my education has increased just by being in the classroom with the kids ... The [Parents' Association] in particular has taught me to have my say instead of sitting back, and be more outspoken things ...* (Participant 11)

The next parent identifies the main benefit of community participation in the high school Parents' Association as the knowledge and satisfaction gained through learning to work as a team:

> *You can feel involvement, feel part of something ... and think yeah okay I participated in that, you worked for that, we got it, yeah like it's just, to be a part of something and to see what you can do, and put it together.* (Participant 8)

Other school-based interactions and their outcomes

As well as the four major catalysts for interaction, the schools provided a number of other opportunities for school-community interaction, which had important social outcomes for the community. For example, casual 'school gate' interactions, as well as more formal school-based interactions, played an important role in establishing and maintaining social networks, particularly for newcomers to the community. The following community member explains:

> *We came here when my children were in Grade 1 and I think that helped me settle into the community a lot quicker because I had the contacts ... people that don't have children would find it hard to settle into the community because they don't have those contacts that they make within the school ... For my first four years in [the town] the school was my social life ...* (Participant 15)

Such interactions also played an important role in transmitting the values of the community:

> *[The school] forms a basis for the whole social structure of the community ...* (Participant 5)

Intergenerational links were forged through a variety of school activities, including informal and formal involvement of parents, extended families and wider community members in school activities, involvement of the school in community service activities, and the provision of school facilities and resources for use by community organisations. The following community member captures the importance of these intergenerational links to community cohesiveness:

> *They've got a Red Cross group going and those kids get to do meals on wheels, they go to meet the elderly people and yeah so yeah there's a great deal of interaction really.* (Participant 11)

There were also examples of school staff sharing their expertise with the community, through involvement in, and leadership of, community activities. In this community, there was a relatively high turnover of school staff. This was seen in a positive light by some community members, including the following parent, as it provided an important link to new ideas and expertise from outside the community:

> *... I also think that the fact that they bring in new teachers is an important thing as well in that new teachers bring ... with them new ideas, new options for things ... it opens up wider views to the world that you often don't find in [small] communities.* (Participant 4)

However, the following school staff member found that community attitudes prevented staff from contributing more fully to the community:

> *There is a fairly strong element in some ways of conservatism and resistance to the new people coming in ... you just sense an element of 'why is he doing it' when he's an out of town guy ... I mean it's just been incredible the amount of resistance and unwillingness to change.* (Participant 18)

Several interviewees noted how the recent debate surrounding the proposed amalgamation of the government primary and high schools had provided an important stimulus for community interaction and participative decisionmaking. The two schools involved, in collaboration with community leaders, initiated wide-ranging community consultation regarding the proposed amalgamation. Following these consultations, a decision was made to amalgamate the two schools into a district school, from the year 2000. Those interviewed suggested that the decision was generally well received and supported, because the community felt a sense of ownership of the decision due to their involvement in the decisionmaking process.

Leadership, and other factors which influence schools' contributions to the community

The success of the school-community partnership depended on establishing and maintaining a strong community support base (Miller 1995) which recognised and built upon the reciprocal nature of the partnership. For example, the following extract from a school staff member describes the close interrelationship between the schools' contribution to the economy of the community, and the community support of the schools through fundraising activities:

We employ local tradespeople even though sometimes you have to wait a bit longer, but that's the run of the place and you have to allow for that ... and then when you think of things like some of the fundraising say school fairs and that, the community is always very generous with what they donate ... and it's a continual imposition being put on the businesses around the community but they support it ... so, it's a two way street. (Participant 13)

It was noted that the school-community partnership was strengthened by frequent and ongoing interaction and communication between the school and community. A number of interviewees noted that leadership, particularly within the schools, played a large role in facilitating this communication. School leaders supported two-way communication by providing the opportunity and motivation for school staff and students to be involved in a wide range of community events and activities, and for community members to be involved in school activities and school management. In addition, each school produced regular newsletters, which also fulfilled the role of a weekly community newsletter, in the absence of a regular local newspaper. The role of these newsletters in facilitating two-way communication was highlighted by a number of interviewees.

In addition to a strong community support base and the two-way flow of communication, interviewees identified a number of specific characteristics of the community, and of the school, which enhanced the quality and quantity of these interactions. Community characteristics included the general perception of the importance of education and the local schools, the cohesiveness of the community, the breadth and depth of community involvement in the schools, and community size. School characteristics included the cohesiveness and sense of shared community within the school, the level of involvement of the school within community life, the stability of staffing within the schools, and the size of the school.

Leadership, either within the school, or the community, or both, often determined the extent to which most of these factors influenced the school-community partnership. To reflect this relationship, in this section leadership will not be presented separately as an influencing factor. Rather, aspects of leadership will be presented as they relate to each of the other influencing factors.

- Perception of the importance of education and the local schools

  Overall, community perceptions of the value of the local schools to youth and to the community were positive. These perceptions were influenced by other factors, including tradition, the level of involvement of school staff and particularly school leaders in the community, and the positive publicity of school-community achievements through various media, including the school newsletters and the local radio station. School leadership which valued the importance of community involvement in schools, and of school involvement in the community, was found to create a positive community perception of the local schools. Several community members without school involvement, as well as several school staff, noted that

education at higher levels, however, was not as highly valued within the community.

- Cohesiveness of the community

  Most interviewees described the community as close knit and supportive, and believed this was reflected in the schools. There was an expectation of community involvement in the school and of school involvement in the community. However, some interviewees noted that the structure of the community had changed over the past decade and that there are now two distinct populations: the long-term permanent residents, and the short-term temporary residents. This, coupled with a decreasing population, has meant fewer people to participate in community and school activities. Therefore, there has been a reduction in both the quality and quantity of interactions between community members:

  > *The people ... active today basically are the residents, the people who live in the town ... So again it's social interaction with people being in a permanent base.* (Participant 12)

  This has meant that the community support base for the school-community partnership has been reduced, in terms of numbers and of diversity of background. However, interviewees noted that this was offset to some extent by the high level of commitment of the core group of people who continued to actively support the school-community partnership.

- Cohesiveness of schools

  Most interviewees, regardless of their level of school involvement, described the schools as having a strong sense of community, and noted that school leadership was an important determinant of school cohesiveness. For example, interviewees described how, within each school, emphasis was placed on building relationships within and external to the school, and on fostering intergenerational contact. Because of the strong sense of community within the schools, they attracted wide-ranging community support. For example:

  > *... some of the ladies who are still attending the meetings [of the Parents' Association in the primary school] and who are still helping out with a lot of their fundraising have not had children, and in fact one lady I don't think has even got grandchildren left up there, but she's been working for the school all of those years* ... (Participant 5)

- Level of community involvement in schools

  Most community sectors had some level of involvement in the schools. In particular, parents were actively involved in the organisation and management of each of the town's three schools. An important school and community benefit of parental involvement in the school, particularly in relation to school decisionmaking, was a greater sense of school ownership. The following school Principal notes:

  > *I'll take stuff to school council here that I probably wouldn't anywhere else because I find a way of involving them, and they will claim ownership of things ... I guess [it's] the sense of ownership on the part of the community* ... (Participant 10)

There was evidence that school leadership which facilitated two-way communication and encouraged participative decisionmaking, increased the sense of community ownership of the school, and therefore strengthened the school-community partnership.

Community participation in the schools was enhanced by publicity of the schools' activities. Publicity took a number of forms, including school visibility in the community through the participation of students in community activities; the production of weekly school newsletters which also fulfilled the role of weekly community newsletters, as well as use of the local media to publicise specific school activities. The following extract describes how publicity about the local high school's entry in a national music and drama competition generated wide community support and increased community involvement:

> *Well there'd been a lot of, there was quite a lot of publicity ... sort of statewide publicity and the local radio station was right behind it, that was an important one, the proprietor of the local radio station was sponsoring it, so of course he was, you know, they was mentioned on the radio all the time, and everybody sort of got involved in it that way.* (Participant 1)

However, there was some indication that certain groups within the community, including the business sector, had limited school involvement, and that this was to the detriment of the community as a whole, but particularly its youth. It was suggested that leadership within the educational, and particularly the business sector, needed to be more proactive in forging school-business linkages. By addressing this gap it was felt that the school-community partnership would be strengthened, as the following community member explained:

> *... the business community needs to be receptive to ideas ... about trying to promote entrepreneurship and thinking outside the box, to the students ... the business community ... needs to be very open armed and go into the schools and talk ...* (Participant 3)

- Level of involvement of school in community life

Regular, ongoing and well publicised school involvement in the community enhanced the school-community partnership. The level of school involvement in the community was influenced by tradition and community expectation, but to a large extent was driven by both school and community leadership which valued and actively sought opportunities for school-community interaction. The following community leader has no direct school involvement. In his role of promoting the development of a new tourist venture which will provide future income and employment within the region, he sees school involvement in the project as critical:

> *... we had a public announcement ... we rang the teachers of the three schools here and invited them to bring the students along, because we thought it was very important that those children go along ... this is part of [their] future ... if people in the community show that they can get out there and do something, the children will follow that.* (Participant 12)

This same community leader believed that youth, as community leaders of the future, needed to be involved more in community planning and decisionmaking, as well as maintaining their involvement in the more 'traditional' areas of youth participation such as community service activity and celebration of local events.

A number of interviewees noted that school-community relationships were strengthened when school staff participated in community life outside school hours, and that this was more common in *'fifteen to twenty years ago'* than at present. There was some concern that the level of teaching staff involvement in the community had decreased in recent years due to lack of time, family or work commitments, relatively high staff turnover rates, and 'temporary' (Monday to Friday) residence in the community. However, one school staff member noted that there were a number of pressures on school staff, particularly relating to isolation, which reduced their ability to participate more fully in the community:

> *Most other schools I've worked in ... were not as intense, it's like being in a pressure cooker here ... it's very difficult to get out of town and do professional development, it's difficult with illness, with staff, it's difficult because we're under the spotlight all the time.* (Participant 10)

- Stability of school staff and school leadership

Closely related to the issue of staff involvement in the community was the issue of stability of school staff, and particularly of school leaders. Those staff who made their homes locally were more likely to earn the trust and respect of the community because of the opportunities available for wider interaction and network building. In the following extract, the stability of school leadership in one particular school is directly related to the level of community involvement in the school:

> *... it's very stable leadership ... [the school leaders] have been here for [many] years ... they involve the community in a lot of things like parents and friends, school council, even in the performances that we have ... so the community is involved all the time.* (Participant 9)

Several interviewees noted that the role of ancillary staff in helping to build and maintain good school-community relationships should not be underestimated. Ancillary staff (for example, administrative assistants) are frequently long-term residents of the community and long-term employees of the school. They are often trusted and respected community members who have a wide social network, spanning a variety of sporting groups, service clubs and other organisations, as the following extract illustrates:

> *[Ancillary staff] are the local links within the town and they are a very big part of networking. They can either help the school's image or they can harm the school's image. I think the ancillary staff are the major networking link between the school and the community. And that depends on the Principal's attitude too – how much he or she involves the ancillary staff, mainly by communication of what's happening and what's going on.* (Participant 15)

The stability of school leadership is also enhanced by community involvement in the Parents' Association and School Council or Board of

Management. Community members who choose to involve themselves in this way have a 'vested' interest in initiatives which will benefit both school and community in the longer term.

Community support for the school-community partnership is likely to be strengthened by school leadership which recognises and builds upon these established networks within the community, as well as fostering the development of new relationships and networks.

- Size of the community

A number of respondents who had lived and worked in larger regional towns believed that smaller schools and communities, such as this one with a population of approximately 2500 people, were more cohesive and therefore had stronger school-community partnerships:

> *... in a big high school ... you wouldn't get the community involvement ... I think small town people ... tend to want to help each other ...* (Participant 8)

This same parent explained that in small communities where most community members are known to each other, networks already exist which facilitate collective community action:

> *I grew up in a mining town ... So you're sort of used to small towns and I think you know more people because no matter what you do there's somebody you know in each group ... they are more willing to put in being a small group because they know that if they don't use it they'll lose it.* (Participant 8)

- Size of the school

Several interviewees noted that the size of the school was also an influencing factor in the strength of the school-community partnership. Some, like the following school staff member, thought smaller schools encouraged greater community interaction:

> *.... in my years with the department the smaller the schools the better the parent participation ...* (Participant 13)

Others disagreed that 'small is better', believing that the community was a richer place and that school staff were more likely to become involved in the community before the school and community populations declined:

> *These schools 10 to 15 or 20 years ago were big and the towns were big, and the teachers, there were three or four times the number of teachers in town than there are today, so there was a huge social life, for our teachers outside of school, and also with that layer of professional people in town who no longer live here like the mining engineers the health professionals, all those, that layer of people, they've mostly gone because of the general decline of the town, so the teaching numbers have shrunk hugely and there isn't the sort of likeminded type people in town that there used to be.* (Participant 10)

Discussion

The key findings of the study are discussed in this section under two headings as they relate to the two research questions: What is the nature and extent of the contribution of rural schools to their community's development, beyond traditional forms of education of young people? How does school and community leadership influence the nature and extent of school contributions to the community?

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

Each of the schools has in the past, and continues today, to make a number of significant contributions to the social and, to a lesser extent economic, development of the local community (Glen et al. 1992). The schools function largely as community centres (Miller 1995; 1991) in providing the resources and opportunities for interaction between different members of the school community, and between members of the school and wider community. To a lesser extent, the schools (particularly the high school) have adopted some elements of the community-as-curriculum approach (Miller 1995; 1991). However, as the community moves towards the next century there are positive indications of an increased partnership between school (particularly the high school) and community, in which the school curriculum will be directly related to the new tourist venture. The strength of this vision lies in the collaborative efforts of community and educational leaders who have proposed the appointment of an Education Officer to provide the necessary liaison between school and community as the tourist venture is developed. No evidence of school-based enterprise programs (Miller 1995; 1991) was identified in the data. This is not surprising given that the schools and community are still in the relatively early stages of developing closer structured linkages in terms of the curriculum, and that any development of school-based enterprise seems likely to flow from ongoing community-as-curriculum practices.

Many of the school-community interactions occur through structured and relatively 'traditional' activities, such as school participation in significant community events, and community participation in informal and formal school activities. These interactions, which are wide-ranging and which have been occurring over many years, have given rise to a number of important community outcomes. These include: fostering and strengthening intergenerational links (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Jolly & Deloney 1996; University of Missouri Extension 1996; Nunn 1994; Squires & Sinclair 1990) and intra-community links, within a community where the population is more fluid and transitory than it has ever been; transmitting the norms and values of the community, particularly to new community members, which has enhanced community cohesiveness (Lane & Dorfman 1997); and providing lifelong learning opportunities (Glen et al. 1992) and opportunities for participative decisionmaking, which have facilitated the active participation of community members from a variety of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds in school and community activities.

Change and instability are very much a part of life in the community. There is a declining and less permanent population base; youth are moving to larger regional centres or the capital city, and ongoing uncertainty within the mining industry has necessitated the development of alternative economic bases. It is the stability and permanence of the schools, both physically and symbolically, that has contributed to community morale and community spirit in the face of rapid change (Glen et al. 1992). Several years ago when community uncertainty was high due to a foreshadowed mine closure, the high school entered and won a national music and drama competition. The production, and its success at a nationally, was significant for the community on two levels: it fostered collective action and network building within the community Lane & Dorfman 1997; Holladay 1992), and it reinforced community identity and pride in the face of adversity (Glen et al. 1992; Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987). In another example, the planned merger of the government primary and high schools could have been yet another blow to the community, which has lost numerous government and private services over the past few years. Instead, skilful educational and community leadership, which recognised the importance of community participation in the decisionmaking process, has provided a positive opportunity for the community to work together to determine its own future (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Holladay 1992).

There are still some aspects of the school-community partnership that need to be further addressed; in particular, the relationship between local business and the schools, and the level of involvement of youth in community planning and decisionmaking (Kenyon 1999; Heartland Center for Leadership Devlopment 1987). Local business provides generous financial support to the schools, and it was suggested that this relationship could be used as the foundation for providing support in other areas also. For example, several community leaders have identified a need for businesses to provide youth with increased opportunities to gain experience and knowledge of the workplace, and to stimulate entrepreneurial thinking amongst the town's young people. In part these issues will continue to be addressed by the VET-in-schools program in the high school, which is still in a relatively early stage in this community. However, it would seem that more proactive leadership would allow the benefits of a more structured school-business interaction to be realised. These benefits would include an increased understanding by youth of their own communities, and opportunities for young people to become actively involved in shaping their community's future (Lane & Dorfman 1997; Sorensen & Epps 1996; Miller 1995; Murray & Dunn 1995).

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

The findings indicate that leadership plays a central role in creating the conditions for effective school-community partnerships, and this finding is consistent with the literature (Miller 1998; Combs & Bailey 1992). Those conditions which enhanced the school-community partnership centred around cohesiveness (Mathews 1996; Boyd 1997) and involvement (Kenyon 1999; Peirce & Johnson 1997; Heartland Center for Leadership Development 1987).

Both the schools and the community were viewed as close knit; the schools were seen as reflecting the cohesiveness of the community. This cohesiveness was enhanced by leadership which valued the importance of relationship building and of active involvement in school and community by a wide range of individuals and groups (Falk 1998; Miller 1998; Rogers 1997; Peirce & Johnson 1997; Lane & Dorfman 1997; Mulford 1996). Relationships built through school-community interaction facilitated trust within the schools, and between schools and the community, an important element in building social capital (Falk & Mulford forthcoming; Peirce & Johnson 1997; Putnam 1993). These relationships also extended into networks of support that spanned many sectors of the community, thus expanding and strengthening the support base for the school-community partnership (Miller 1995), and increasing positive community perceptions of the local school system (Combs & Bailey 1992). In particular, community involvement in schools allowed the community a sense of ownership of their schools (Boyd 1997). Whilst some of these conditions fall largely within the domain of educational leadership, and some within the domain of community leadership, most of the conditions for effective school-community partnerships depend on the relationship between school and community leadership. The findings suggest there is a close and complex relationship between school and community leadership, but a detailed examination of this relationship was beyond the scope of this study.

There were some factors affecting the school-community partnership that could not be directly influenced by either local school or community leadership. These included instability of school staffing, high staff workloads and the pressures of working in small, isolated communities. These are complex issues and it is beyond the scope of this paper to address them in specific terms. However, the data suggested that the effects of these issues on the school-community partnership could be reduced if school leadership continued to involve the community through the Parents' Association and, more specifically, through the School Council or Board of Management, and continued to recognise the valuable role of school ancillary staff in providing stable, ongoing links with the community.

Conclusions and recommendations for further research

A strong partnership between local schools and their communities is an important tool in generating social capital. However, effective school-community partnerships do not happen by chance; they are carefully planned and involve high levels of commitment and energy from both groups of participants. This study has provided some indicators of the effectiveness of school-community partnerships: strong commitment to the partnership from school and community leaders; a high level of cohesiveness within the schools and within the community; a shared school and community belief that the partnership is viewed as long-term and integral to community development; wide-ranging and ongoing involvement by community members in all aspects of the school's organisation and management; wide-ranging and ongoing involvement of school students and staff in a range of community activities;

strong sense of ownership of the school by the community, and high visibility of the school within the community.

The role of school and community leadership in determining the effectiveness of the partnership is central. Effective community and educational leaders are those who recognise the value of developing and strengthening the school-community partnership, and who are equipped with the tools to enhance this partnership. The study has provided some indicators of effective school and community leadership which enhances the school-community partnership. Such leadership actively engages in relationship building; facilitates two-way communication; strongly supports and encourages the involvement of a wide range of community members through active participation in ongoing activities as well as planning and decisionmaking, and supports both a philosophy and practice of shared leadership. However, the relationship between educational and community leadership, and their combined effects on the nature and extent of the school-community partnership, is complex and requires further investigation. It is therefore recommended that the indicators of effective school-community partnerships, together with the indicators of effective school and community leadership, form the basis of continuing research with a larger sample of rural communities.

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I. Document Identification:

Title: School Contribution to Rural Communities: Leadership Issues

Author: Susan Johns, Sue Kilpatrick, Ian Falk and Bill Mulford

Corporate Source: Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania, Locked Bag 1-313, Launceston, Tasmania 7250, Australia

Publication Date: 2000

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