Context, Curriculum, and Community Matter: Leadership Practices of Primary School Principals in the Otago Province of New Zealand

Darrell Latham

Lisa F. Smith

K. Anne Wright

University of Otago

This research examined the leadership practices of rural primary school principals in the Otago province of New Zealand. Principals of large rural schools (with a role of 150 and above) and small rural schools (with a role of 60 or below) served as participants in an investigation to learn what about their practice creates and maintains effective rural schools. The goals were to investigate the interrelationships of principal, curriculum, and community and to examine principals' practices in relationship to effective leadership in their schools. A mixed methods approach comprised a survey designed for the study completed by rural principals (n = 63), followed by observations over 3 days and then interviews with 6 principals. Key findings were that leadership practices varied across contexts of large rural and small rural schools; having a local curriculum was critical; and, communication and involvement with parents and the community were essential. The survey had good psychometric qualities; validation through future research use is needed. Results are discussed in terms of factors to consider for effective leadership in rural schools.

Key Words: Rural context, effective leadership, curriculum, community relationships

Research on leadership abounds (see e.g., Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Robertson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009); research on leadership in the rural context is not as plentiful. Yet, there can be little doubt that the environment in which a leader works strongly influences the effectiveness of the leadership. As Southworth (2002) noted, "One of the most robust findings from leadership research is that context matters" (p. 451). Ewington et al. (2008) observed, however, that although context affects the ability to lead a school, the literature has not attended to how specific school environments differentially affect leadership practices.

Part of the problem has been in determining what constitutes being *rural* (Coladarci, 2006; Starr & White, 2008; Bollman & Alasia 2011). According to the official United States Census Bureau, rural refers to a community in which there are fewer than 2,500 inhabitants (US Economic Research Service, 2012). In Australia rural and remote settlements are defined as towns of less than a 1,000 people (Australian Burea of Statistics, 2011). The Australian Government (2013) however, defined rural as meaning centres with less than 10,000 people. Other countries define rural on a different basis and take into account economic activity and service availibililty (Pizzili & Gong, 2007).

However, for schools in New Zealand, there is now an important difference. In 2002, as part of Targeted Funding for Isolation (NZ Ministry of Education 2012), an Isolation Index was introduced. The Isolation Index uses a weighted calculation based on each rural school's distance from population centres of 5,000, 20,000, and 100,000 (that provide the range of goods and services needed to operate schools and deliver the curriculum). Schools with an isolation index of 1.65 or higher receive isolation funding. Schools with an isolation index under 1.65 do not, even though they may be rural or semi-rural by location.

Having past ties to the community influenced a principal's ability to secure the position (Schuman, 2010). Growing up in a rural district or school community created the perception of credibility amongst the community and showed that the principal shared a common set of values and beliefs generally consistent with members of the school community (Foster & Goodard, 2003; Lock, Budgen, Lunlay, 2012; Schuman, 2010). The opposite was also evident where principals who did not share similar

values and beliefs were considered to be outsiders and viewed with a degree of scepticism or mistrust (Keddie & Niesche, 2012).

The New Zealand Context

Schools in NZ became independent and self-managing with the introduction of education reforms in 1989 (Wylie, 1999). Being self-managing places a wide range of responsibilities on principals, who must manage all aspects of a school, from maintaining the physical plant and deciding how many pencils to order, to all manner of staffing issues. It should be noted that over 70% of New Zealand's primary schools are small rural schools, in which the principals also teach (Statistics New Zealand, 2012).

From its inception in 1992, the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) has encouraged schools to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of their particular students and communities (NZ Ministry of Education, 2007). For rural schools, community and curriculum are as interrelated as school and community. Miller (1995) identified the community as curriculum approach (known in the United States as place-based curriculum) as a means through which strong relationships between schools and communities can be built. However, the introduction of National Standards in New Zealand in 2010 (NZ Curriculum Online, 2012) has translated to ever-increasing pressure to raise achievement within its stated parameters, especially for low-achieving and disadvantaged students, and on accountability for schools. Although much of what the National Standards are trying to effect is commendable, there may well prove to be an impact on the community as curriculum appproach used in rural schools. As Stapleton (2010) predicted,

> If the National Standards policy gains precedence over the local curriculum opportunity then there is no doubt that rural schools will ultimately end up with an urban oriented teaching and learning programme. It will be to the rural community's disadvantage if the curriculum is no longer locally, and culturally relevant. (p. 10).

Within this context, it is critical that we identify the leadership practices and the factors that lead to having effective rural schools, and to determine the role of the rural principal in effectively bringing together school, community, and curriculum. Therefore, the primary objectives for this research were to examine the professional practices of rural school principals across a variety of rural contexts in the province of Otago, New Zealand; to investigate the interrelationships of principal, curriculum, and community across these rural school contexts: and, to explore what it is about their practices that creates and maintains their effectiveness.

These objectives were investigated using the following research questions:

1. To what extent is effectiveness in rural schools a function of interactions among the dimensions of the principal's leadership, the school's curriculum, and the context of the wider community?
2. What professional practices are identified as effective by rural primary principals in Otago?
3. How do rural principals develop partnerships with their communities?
4. What professional practices and processes are effective for principals in implementing a "local" curriculum?

The theoretical framework for the study was constructivist (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and interpretational (Barker 2006; Stake, 1995). Constructions involved obtaining descriptions and interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the individual contexts in the study, that is, the rural principals. An interpretational framework was used, as the personal perspective of the primary researcher was as an experienced rural principal.

Method

This study used a mixed-methods approach comprising a survey of rural principals in the Otago region, site visits in which the primary researcher shadowed six purposely selected principals over a period of several days, and semi-structured interviews of the six principals following the observations. The mixed methods approach was both appropriate and practicable for the design of the study, not least being that it bridges the gap between quantitative and qualitative designs, thus offering emperical precision as described by Onwueegbuzie and Leech (2006). In the context of this research study, the judgment as to effectiveness of small and rural schools depended not only on the abilities and leadership of the principal, but also on the relationship among the principals, school students, families, boards of trustees, and the wider community in which the school was located (see Barley & Beesley, 2007; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Ford & Prescott, 2002).

A core set of leadership practices were identified from the literature (Hallinger & Heck,

1996, 1998, 2002; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006b; Robinson, 2009), which closely reflect a transformational approach to leadership (Harris, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) and are prominent in incorporating the essential factors of effective schools. The constructs chosen for the research were developed from these and were based on: professional practices and processes that principals have found effective in developing and sustaining relationships within and outside the school; professional practices and processes that principals have found effective in designing and implementing a new curriculum; the concept of rurality; and, the demographics of rural principals.

Participants

There are 73 primary rural schools in Otago; all principals of those schools were invited to participate by completing a survey (described below). Of those, 63 (86%) principals responded. For the observations and interviews, six principals were chosen, two from each of the three geographic areas of the region. For each pair of principals, roll sizes were used to select one principal from a small rural school (fewer than 26 students) and one principal from a large rural school (151-300 students). Each of the six principals also had had excellent reports from recent evaluations completed by New Zealand's Education Review Office (see http://www.ero.govt.nz/).

Of the 63 respondents to the survey, 27 (41.3%) were male and 36 (55.6%) were female; 90% were over the age of 40. Only five female principals held a masters degree and one female had a doctorate; no male principals had any post graduate qualifications (e.g., a Masters degree or post graduate diploma).

Materials

A survey (available from the first author) was developed and comprised 120 questions in six sections. The first section explored respondent demographics; the five subsequent sections asked respondents to rate on a six-point Likert scale (a) their perception of the importance of 25 school leadership practices; (b) their use of the same 25 leadership practices; (c) their communication with parents and the community; (d) the rural school context, and (e) the rural school curriculum.

For the observations, a schedule was developed using selected headings from Kiwi Leadership (Ministry of Education, 2008), a guideline produced by the New Zealand Ministry of Education for New Zealand principals.

The semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix 1) were designed to explore the findings from the survey and the observations in more depth.

Procedure

Ethical permission was obtained by the University Ethics Committee; Māori Consultation was also completed. All participating principals completed informed consent documents.

The survey, observation schedule, and interview questions were pilot tested with three principals in rural areas outside of Otago, resulting in minor changes to wording of some items. The survey was mailed to all rural principals in Otago in the first term of the year; reminders were sent after two weeks. The observations and interviews with the six principals were held during the third term of the year. It should be noted that New Zealand schools use a calendar year beginning typically in late January. The observations lasted three days for each principal; each then engaged in an interview that lasted approximately 2 hours. All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and sent to the individual principals for confirmation of the content, prior to coding.

The quantitiative data from the surveys were analysed using SPSS Version 16. Analyses included computing descriptive statistics for the demographic items, factor analysis of the remaining five sections of the survey, and reliabilities for resulting subscales. The subscale scores were used in *t*-tests and analyses of variance to permit comparisons among the groups based on their demographics.

For the qualitative data, notes from the observations and transcriptions of the individual interviews were analysed following Straus and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory, with an iterative approach using constant comparisons to responses. The themes that emerged from the qualitative data were examined in relationship to the findings from the quantitative data.

Results

Table 1 shows the roll size of the participating schools. Over ¼ of the principals were from schools with fewer than 26 students

(categorised in New Zealand as roll size 1-50) and 11 principals were from large rural schools with rolls of 151-300. Twenty-five percent had been in their current position fewer than 3 years and 52% fewer than 5 years. A third had been raised in rural areas. Half reported that they knew their district well before taking the principalship, consciously chose their school as a lifestyle choice, and were involved in the community. Although 83% reported being satisfied in their work; 1/3 expressed a desire to shift to a larger school if they could. It is important to note that in New Zealand, each school is an independent entity; there are no school districts or divisions such as might be found in the United States and Canada.

Table 1
Roll Size of Participating Schools

Roll Size	Total (%)
U1: 1-50	27 (42.0%)
U2: 51-100	13 (20.8%)
U3: 101-150	12 (19.2%)
U4: 151-300	7 (11.2%)
>U4: 301-500	4 (6.4%)

Note: New Zealand schools have a U-grade to describe roll size.

Factor Analyses

Factor analyses were computed for each of the remaining five sections of the survey (see Tables 2 & 3). Items were rated using a Likert-type scale of **one (low)** to **six (high).** Using a criterion of eigenvalue > 1 with a direct oblimin rotation, the 25 items pertaining to ideal school leadership practices (those that would be practiced in a perfect world) loaded on six factors that were made into subscales. "Loading" refers to the relationship between an individual variable (or item in this case) and the factor that has been created. Loadings are similar to correlation coefficients in magnitude. The loadings for a particular factor can be thought of as multipliers that combine to form the factor, which we call a subscale here. For responses to the ideal leadership practices, the first subscale pertained to *designing the organization*, with 10 items related to developing structures that give direction to the school (32.16% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .91). The second subscale related to *developing people*, with 5 items that addressed how the principal provided a supportive climate (11.06% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .79). The third subscale addressed *expectations,* with 3 items related to expectations of students by staff (faculty are referred to as staff in New Zealand), parents, and community members (7.82% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .77). The fourth subscale pertained to *flexibility,* with 3 items related to flexibility for the organization and the staff (6.82% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .69). The fifth subscale was termed *monitoring*, with 2 items, related to overseeing the implementation and management of the instructional program (6.28% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .75). The sixth subscale concerned *leadership style*, with 2 items (4.51% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .30). This low reliability most likely occurred because feedback from the principals indicated that the item, *I don't have a preferred leadership style*, was ambiguous. Complete results for the factor structure can be found in Table 3. In sum, for ideal practice, the important components (in order) pertained to: designing the organization to give direction to the school and developing people in a supportive climate. These were followed by: addressing expectations of students by staff, parents, and community members; having flexibility within the organization and toward staff; and, monitoring instructional programs. Having a clear leadership style was less critical to the principals' perceptions of makes for ideal practice.

The 25 items repeated for actual practice also loaded on six factors, with considerable but not identical overlap with the "ideal" responses. The first subscale related to *designing the organisation*, with 12 items, 8 of which were identical to the ideal subscale (34.11% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .93). The second subscale concerned *expectations*, with 3 items (10.09% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .71). Instead of staff expectations (which loaded on the "ideal" expectations subscale), Board of Trustees expectations loaded on this factor. The third subscale pertained to *flexibility*, with 3 items (7.78% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .78). The fourth subscale addressed *monitoring*, with 2 items (6.14% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .61). The fifth subscale was labeled leadership style, with 3 items (5.84% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .38). The sixth subscale pertained to *principal initiatives,* with 2 items that related to introducing initiatives with uncertain outcomes (4.44% of the variance, coefficient alpha = .14). Complete results for the factor structure can be found in Table 3.

Table 2
Factorial Structure Of The Six-Factor Solution for the Ideal Items (n =63)

Item	Factor						Communality
	1	2	3	4	5	6	h2
Staff share a consensus on goals	.759	.113	.019	.118	.116	.068	.622
Shared beliefs learning/teaching	.835	.162	.087	.145	-.097	.017	.762
Staff share sense of community	.766	.216	.146	.031	-.128	-.164	.700
Staff talk about curriculum	.809	.131	.015	.302	.049	.085	.774
Staff high expectations	.158	-.258	.651	.101	.122	.031	.541
Parents high expectations	-.041	.051	.912	.011	.159	.068	.866
Community high expectations	.030	.056	-.099	.068	.016	.216	.743
Involve staff in decisions/policies	.822	.299	-.099	.068	.016	.216	.828
Directly involved curriculum	.236	.184	.168	-.311	.3	.555	.631
Regularly monitor curriculum	.001	-.001	.375	.205	.753	.170	.779
Regularly monitor achievement	.073	.167	.131	.062	.858	.022	.791
Model new teaching/assessment	.486	-.011	.028	-.075	.292	.287	.411
No preferred leadership style	.112	.110	.127	-.031	-.050	-.729	.576
Leadership style involves others	.276	.208	.330	.536	-.199	.395	.711
Confident with learning initiatives	.536	-.059	.021	.266	.007	-.256	.427
Encourage staff to express opinions	.793	.299	-.018	.118	.057	-.174	.765
Engage with staff in discussion	.773	.221	.101	.186	.162	.026	.718
Teaching time protected	.063	.732	-.128	.091	.141	.355	.711
Open door policy	.446	.691	-.050	-.141	.092	-.121	.722
Take into account personal aspects	.384	.797	-.020	.045	-.060	.052	.791
Meet with staff socially	.199	.526	.174	.449	-.031	-.060	.553
Encourage staff try new year levels	.170	-.047	-.218	.775	.125	-.192	.732
Staff encouraged to exchange roles	.351	.178	.045	.715	.164	.087	.703
Staff follow established routines	.517	.289	.130	.487	.336	-.081	.724
The BOT expects the principal	.184	.645	-.028	.180	.183	-.269	.589
Eigenvalue	8.04	2.76	1.96	1.71	1.57	1.13	
% of Variance	32.16	11.06	7.82	6.82	6.28	4.51	
Factor	Designing the organisat-ion	Develop-ing people	Expecta-ions	Flexi-bility	Monit-oring	Leader-ship style	

Table 3
Factorial Structure Of The Six-Factor Solution for the Actual Items (n =63)

Item	Factor						Communality
	1	2	3	4	5	6	h2
Staff share a consensus on goals	.863	-.129	.224	.045	-.036	.061	.819
Shared beliefs learning/teaching	.752	-.272	.225	.122	-.002	-.146	.727
Staff share sense of community	.614	-.266	.113	.191	-.192	-.186	.569
Staff talk about curriculum	.797	-.102	.207	.176	-.085	-.052	.730
Staff high expectations	.029	.053	.105	.003	.740	.090	.570
Parents high expectations	-.080	.864	.012	.154	.070	-.012	.782
Community high expectations	-.156	.868	-.001	.067	.100	-.197	.831
Involve staff in decisions/policies	.862	.097	.067	-.042	.020	.035	.759
Directly involved curriculum	.259	.110	-.122	.315	.170	.660	.658
Regularly monitor curriculum	.014	.046	.106	.825	.117	.118	.722
Regularly monitor achievement	.041	.181	-.055	.732	-.054	.023	.577
Model new teaching/assessment	.589	.313	-.012	-.078	.459	.241	.719
No preferred leadership style	-.041	.024	.252	.245	.558	-.426	.619
Leadership style involves others	.819	-.020	.148	-.007	.010	.053	.696
Confident with learning initiatives	.487	.205	-.033	-.023	.157	-.619	.688
Encourage staff to express opinions	.869	.161	.067	-.090	.080	-.097	.810
Engage with staff in discussion	.838	-.18	.113	.152	-.058	.015	.742
Teaching time protected	.375	.072	.211	.222	-.187	-.138	.294
Open door policy	.752	.011	.189	-.062	.113	.314	.716
Take into account personal aspects	.814	.134	.059	-.058	-.099	.089	.705
Meet with staff socially	.436	.344	.267	.037	-.557	.108	.703
Encourage staff try new year levels	.098	-.49	.859	-.046	.079	-.050	.761
Staff encouraged to exchange roles	.463	-015	.704	-.041	.029	-.068	.717
Staff follow established routines	.425	-010	.688	.221	.076	-.009	.708
The BOT expects the principal	.194	.562	-.104	.094	-.216	.246	.481
Eigenvalue	8.53	2.53	1.95	1.54	1.46	1.11	
% of Variance	34.11	10.09	7.78	6.14	5.84	4.44	
Factor	Designing the organisati-on	Develop-ing people	Expectat-ions	Flexi-bility	Monit-oring	Leader-ship style	

In sum, for actual practice, the important components (in order) pertained to: designing the organisation and meeting the expectations of Board of Trustees members. These were followed by: having flexibility and monitoring instructional programmes. Leadership style and the introduction of initiatives that carried some risk were perceived by the principals as being lesser components of their actual practice.

The three items on the survey in the subsection on communication loaded onto one factor (alpha = .59); similarly, the seven items on

rural school contexts subsection loaded onto one factor (alpha = .82) and the seven items on the rural school curriculum subsection loaded onto one factor (alpha = .88).

Observations

In terms of the observational data, the three principals at the large rural schools worked an average of 9 hours per day, with their time evenly distributed across administrative tasks (e.g., email, phone, payroll), setting directions, meeting with staff/students/board members/parents, working on development of staff, and matters related to building/resources. In contrast, the three small rural school principals worked an average of approximately 10 hours per day. Their time was configured as 5 hours per day of teaching, balanced with 2 hours per day of administrative work, just under 2 hours per day on development, and over an hour per day on answering mail/phone calls/email.

Interviews

Six themes emerged from the interviews: a close/personal connection with the community, the need for a local curriculum, responsibility for the implementation of the curriculum, workload and stress, leadership practices as affected by context, and national standards/reporting results to parents. All six principals felt stress related to living and working "in a fish bowl." They felt a strong need to be involved with and/or visible in the community, often attending sporting events on weekends and for the small rural school principals, socialising with parents in clubs and activities. Related to this, context differences emerged regarding having teaching duties and taking time to visit students in their homes (for small rural school principals) compared to living outside of the community (for large rural school principals). Having high expectations for students was routinely reported across all of the schools. The principals also reported having positive relationships with their staff members, taking staff members' personal aspects into consideration when making decisions, and meeting socially with staff outside of school hours when distance was not a factor. Across contexts, it was important that the curriculum reflected some aspects of the local area in the content, but for small schools the curriculum content needed to be about the local history, and the community and environs; this needed to be developed in consultation with the local community. There were differences between the small rural and large rural schools in terms of curriculum implementation as well, with the bulk of this responsibility falling to the small rural school principals, while the large rural school principals involved staff, outside experts, and even students in curriculum implementation. All six principals were finding their way with the recent introduction of National Standards and its new reporting requirements to parents. Finally, the principals were eager to discuss issues regarding becoming a rural principal, and to make recommendations for what was needed to be successful in that role.

Discussion

Context mattered. Small rural school leadership was qualitatively different from that in larger rural schools, as a consequence of being a teaching principal for small rural schools, but also as a consequence of the context of small rural school itself.

Leadership practices, although consistent with the core practices identified by research (see e.g., Bell, Bolam & Cubillo, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003), varied in emphasis within the different contexts of large rural and small rural schools. Large rural school principals were able to routinely use distributed leadership; small rural schools did not. All of the principals emphasised their open door policies for staff and community. Modelling new practices by the principal occurred more in small rural schools, and although all schools monitored school goals and student achievement, those were done more regularly in the small rural schools, as well. This suggests that principals in rural schools, and in particular in small rural schools, need to be able to allocate their time effectively while maintaining balance among demands of the students, staff, parents, community, physical plant, and personal needs (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Renihan & Noonan, 2012). Principals in this study emphasised the importance of their role in the community and how having an understanding of the dynamics of living in a rural community was both a positive and enabling attribute (Foster & Goodard, 2003; Lock, Budgen, Lunlay, 2012; Schuman, 2010).

Context affected curriculum. Having a local curriculum was critical, and was incorporated in some form in all of the rural schools, regardless of size. The critical nature of having a local curriculum suggests several characteristics

and/or skills that would benefit aspiring rural principals. A basic knowledge of how to develop a relevant local curriculum would seem mandatory. To obtain the necessary content basis, though, requires having relational skills that would permit the principal to develop positive working relationships with parents, staff, and the wider community. Monitoring what is developed for academic achievement and progress follow, and require being able to successfully coordinate local needs with policy demands. Communication and involvement with parents and the community are, therefore, essential. In practice, they took on different approaches according to the size of the school. Although all of the principals viewed community support as positive and vital for their schools' sustainability, and all emphasised the integral nature of their school and community, the small rural school principals felt a greater need to be visible, available, and actively involved with parents and in the community, as compared to the larger rural school principals. This supports evidence from the literature that has suggested that schools in rural areas provide much more than educational services, and are vital to the economic and social well-being of many communities (Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk, & Prescott, 2002; Lyson, 2002, 2005; Salant & Waller, 1998; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra & Angelidous, 2011). Those wanting to be rural school principals should understand the commitments that they will assume and may look for professional development opportunities to build their interpersonal and communication skills.

In sum, professional leadership practice was different in several of the small rural school principals as compared to the large rural school principals who participated in this study, suggesting that leadership practice needs to be considered in context. Key findings of each research question can be summarised, as follows, by research question:

1. *To what extent is effectiveness in rural schools a function of interactions among the dimensions of the principal's leadership, the school's curriculum, and the context of the wider community?*

   Effectiveness in rural schools, especially in small rural schools, is indeed a function of interactions among the principal, the curriculum, and the principal's relationship with the wider community. All three components are vital; the absence of any one, while not guaranteeing failure denies success, in that the school equates to being perceived by the community as being a less effective school.

2. *Which professional leadership practices did rural primary principals in Otago identify as being important?*

   The professional leadership practices that the rural principals identified as important aligned with core practices described in the literature. These included shared beliefs about teaching and learning and common values that were visible and articulated, all alongside a supportive teaching environment in which instruction was individualised and met the students' needs and included the community. How these practices were enacted, however, varied by context of of large or small rural schools.

3. *How do rural principals develop partnerships with their communities?*

   As with leadership practices, developing partnerships with the community comprised similar underlying beliefs. Good and regular communication was deemed essential. Face to face contact was recognised as the lynchpin for all schools. Critically important was parental communication, especially for smaller schools, who had contact with parents on most days. Outside of school events, particulalry sporting occasions and cultural events, were recognised as vitaal for developing successful relationships in both large and small communities. The extent and depth of involvement in the community, however, was greater for small rural schools as compared to large rural schools.

4. *What professional practices and processes are effective for principals in implementing a "local" curriculum?*

The range of strategies involved both formal and informal methods for introducing parents and community to what was happening in the classroom. All principals reported that implementing a local curriculum took time and involved extensive consultation of all groups, including students. Featuring the locale and history of the school's environs was essential, as

was communication and monitoring. Larger rural schools were more likely to use external facilitators; smaller rural schools used local staff.

Conclusion

Although generalisability of these findings is limited to those areas similar to rural Otago, New Zealand, the results point to the importance of the interrelationships of leadership, curriculum, and community as important components of effective schools in a rural context. This study contributes the development of a survey for future research, which was found to have good psychometric qualities, as demonstrated by the results of the factor analysis and reliability statistics for the subscales obtained. Validation through its use in future research is needed.

Some questions for future investigation might include:

1. Do the findings for this study replicate in other areas of New Zealand?
2. What leadership practices are considered effective by rural community members?
3. Does the factor structure from the survey replicate for other rural areas?
4. Do the findings from this study differ for principals of intermediate and secondary schools in rural areas?
5. Has the implementation of national standards in New Zealand had an impact on how principals lead rural schools?

References

Ashton, B., & Duncan, H. E. (2012). A beginning rural principal's toolkit: A guide for success. *The Rural Educator, 33*(1), 37–47.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). *Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS).*Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2901.0Chapter23102011

Barley, Z. A., & Beesley, A. D. (2007). Rural school success: What can we learn? *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 22*(1). Retrieved from http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/221.pdf

Barker, B. (2006). Rethinking leadership and change: A case study in leadership succession and its impact on school transformation. *Cambridge Journal of Education, 36*, 277-293.

Bell, L., Bolam., R., & Cubillo, L. (2003). *A systematic review of the impact of school headteachersand principals on student outcomes.* London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Unit, Institute of Education.

Bollman, R. D., & Alasia, A. (2011). A profile of self-employment in rural and small town Canada: Is there an impending retirement of self-employed business operators? *The Daily, 9*(1), 1–38.

Coladarci, T. (2006). School size, student achievement, and the 'power rating' of poverty: Substantive finding or statistical artifact? *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 14*(28), 1-26.

Ewington, J., Mulford, B., Kendall, D., Edmunds, B., Kendall, L., & Silins, H. (2008). Successful school principalship in small schools. *Journal of Educational Administration. 45*, 545-561.

Foster, R., & Goddard, T. (2003). Leadership and culture in schools in northern British Columbia: Bridge building and/or re-balancing act? *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 27. Retrieved from http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/articles/miscellaneousArticles/fostrverd.html

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln,Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research, 1980-1985. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *32*, 544.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R.H. (1998). Exploring the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of methodological issues, 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *9*, 157-191

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R.H. (2002). What do you call people with visions? The role of vision, mission and goals in school leadership improvement. In K. Leithwood and P. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 9-40). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Harris, A. (2005). Leading from the chalk-face: An overview of school leadership. *Leadership, 1*, 73-87.

Keddie, A., & Niesche, R. (2012). It's almost like a white school now: Racialised complexities, indigenous representation and school leadership. *Critical Studies in Education, 53*(2), 169–182

Kilpatrick, S., Johns, S., Mulford, B., Falk, I., & Prescott, L. (2002), *More than an education: Leadership for rural school-community partnerships* (Research Report No. 02/055). Retrieved 5 April 2013 from https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/downloads/02-055.

Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2006). *Successful school leadership: What it is and how it influences pupil learning*. (No. RR800). Nottingham, UK: NCSL.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). Transformational leadership. In B. Davies (Ed.), *The essentials of school leadership* (pp. 31-43). London: Paul Chapman Publishing and Corwen Press.

Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What do we already know about successful school leadership* Washington, DC: AERA Division Task Force.

Lock, G., Budgen, F., & Lunay, R. (2012). The loneliness of the long-distance principal: Tales from remote Western Australia. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education, 22*(2), 65–77.

Lyson, T. A. (2002). What does a school mean to a community? Assessing the social and economic benefits of schools to rural villages in new york. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 17*(3), 131-137.

Lyson, T. A. (2005). The importance of schools to rural community viability. *The Role of Education: Promoting the Economic and social Vitality of Rural (*pp. 23 - 27). Starkville, MS: Southern Rural Development Center, Mississippi State University.

Miller, B. A. (1995). The role of rural schools in community developments. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 11*, 163-172.

New Zealand Curriculum Online (2012). *National Standards*. Retrieved 5 April 2013 from http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards.

New Zealand Ministry of Education (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum: For English medium teaching and learning in years 1-13.* Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media Limited.

New Zealand Ministry of Education (2008). *Kiwi leadership for principals: Principals as educational leaders. Retrieved 5 April 2013 from http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Professional-information/Kiwi-leadership-for-principals*

New Zealand Ministry of Education (2012). *Targeted Funding for Isolation Index*. Retrieved 5 April 2013 from www.minedu.govt.nz

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2006). Linking research questions to mixed methods data analysis procedures. *The Qualitative Report, 11*, 474-498.

Pashiardis, P., Savvides, V., Lytra, E., & Angelidou, K. (2011). Successful school leadership in rural contexts: The case of Cyprus. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 39*(5), 536–553. doi:10.1177/1741143211408449

Pizzoli, E., & Gong, X. (2007). How to best classify rural and urban. In S. Lenders, L. Lauwers, & E. Kerselaers (Eds.), *Rural-urban delimitation: A statistical analysis*. Merelbeke, Belgium: ILVA.

Renihan, P., & Noonan, B. (2012). Principals as assessment leaders in rural Schools. *Rural Educator, 33*(3), 1–8.

Robertson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why. Best evidence synthesis iteration*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.

Salant, P., & Waller, A. (1998). *What difference do local schools make? A literature review and bibliography*. Washington, DC: Annenberg Rural Challenge Policy Program. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No: ED437260).

Schuman, A. L. (2010). *Rural high school principals: Leadership in rural education*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/634817394

Southworth, G (2002). Lessons from successful leadership in small schools. In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (Eds.), *Second international handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp.451-483). Dordrecht: Kluwere.

Stake, R., E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Stapleton, J. (2010) The rural schooling scenario. *Education Today, 10,* 9-11.
Statistics New Zealand (2012). *Statistics – Schooling.* Retrieved 21 February 2012 from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics
Starr, K., & White, S. (2008). The small rural school principalship: Key challenges and cross-school responses. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 23*(5), 1-12.
Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
United States Economic Research Service, USDA. (2012). *What is rural?* Retrieved 5 April 2013 from http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural.aspx#.UV4YghlMapx
Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: McREL.
Wylie C. (1999). *Ten years on: How schools view educational reform*. Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Council For Educational Research.

Appendix 1. Semi-Structured Interview questions

1. What factors have you found are the most critical for success in a rural school context?
2. Which professional practices have you found to be particularly effective as a rural principal? What results have you experienced with this practice? What do you feel hasn't worked? Any reason(s) you can put this down to?
3. The survey results indicated that the majority of the principals surveyed stated their perception was that staff members tend to have high expectations of students, yet parents have high expectations infrequently. How would you explain this finding?
4. Protection of teaching time was agreed to be important by the majority of principals, but in actual practice this occurred less than 50% of the time. How would you explain this discrepancy? Any thoughts on how to change it?
5. What strategies have you found to be successful in developing partnerships with your community? Have you shared these with other principals? What hasn't worked for you? What are you planning to do that's new/different in the future?
6. Regular parent involvement in classroom programmes was greater in larger schools than smaller schools. How would you interpret this result? What implications do you see coming from this?**.**
7. Shared beliefs were more common in the smaller schools; however, 20% of principals (all from small schools) disagreed that their schools and communities shared common values. How would you explain this finding? What would you say to that 20% in terms of what they could do to readdress the balance?
8. Identify your most successful strategies in implementing the new curriculum. What would you have done differently, if anything?
9. How will you work to implement the new standards that are being introduced, both within your school, with your staff, and in terms of reporting to parents?
10. Survey results indicated 93% support for a local curriculum. Can you identify the focus of your local curriculum? Are there changes that you'd like to make to your local curriculum?
11. How do you design and implement you local curriculum? Does any other member of staff have a major responsibility for the design and implementation of curriculum? If so what do they do? If not, would you like assistance with this or does it work well the way it is? Why/ Why not?
12. A comparison of gender with highest level of qualification attained showed that 10% of females only, attained postgraduate qualifications. What is the significance of this finding? Should females be encouraged to attain higher qualifications? Why/why not? What would be the implications of that?
13. Over forty percent of principals surveyed would like to be in a different position. Why do you think this is? What sort of different position do you think they want?
14. Principals rated professional practices related to **developing staff** as a priority, whereas in schools stakeholders' **expectations of students and of principals** rated higher. How would you explain this finding?
15. How does your daily work – i.e. what you really do each day – compare with your expectations of being a principal?

16. What do you think are the most important qualities for a principal in a rural environment?
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

About the authors:

Darrell Latham a senior lecturer in the Centre for Educational Leadership and Administration and the Master's program coordinator at the University Of Otago College Of Education. He is a qualified and experienced primary and special education teacher. Darrell has extensive experience as a professional development coordinator and consultant. His research interests include teachers and principals perceptions of school leadership and, the politics of education. Darrell is a frequent contributor to media on educational issues.

Lisa F. Smith is Professor of Education and Dean of the University of Otago College of Education. Lisa received her doctorate in Educational Statistics and Measurement from Rutgers University in New Jersey; she joined the University of Otago in 2005. Her research focuses on assessment issues related to both standardized and classroom testing, preservice teacher efficacy, and the psychology of aesthetics.

K. Anne Wright has enjoyed a career teaching in rural schools in New Zealand and has been recognised as an award-winning rural school principal. She received her doctorate in 2012 from the University of Otago. She is now retired and enjoying new adventures.