A CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE WORK OF EXPERIENCED TEACHING-PRINCIPALS

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Four experienced teaching-principals, two men and two women, administering very small schools in Victoria, Australia completed three repertory grids, which provide the means for semi-structured interviews about their work as leaders. The grids were concerned with work tasks, professional relationships and school events. The major finding was that these four experienced teaching-principals perceived themselves to be professional and related to their schools as communities rather than organisations, and this concept was underpinned by three ideas. Each participant strongly identified with the idea of themselves as classroom teachers, each was an extremely efficient and effective manager of time, and they each controlled and nurtured a shared school agenda. Sergiovanni's stewardship model, with its emphasis on community and professionalism, has much to recommend it as a template for individuals appointed to a teaching-principalship. For these school leaders in the present study any system-wide innovation is likely to be anticipated in terms of what it may mean for their students, their current school priorities, and the effect it may have on their school community.

Key words: *small school, management, leadership, professionalism, stewardship, conceptualisation*

INTRODUCTION

This research looks at how experienced leaders of very small schools conceptualise their own leadership. It is important because much of the research written about school leadership and management is set in larger schools, led by a non-teaching principal, or a leadership team, and the findings and conclusions about those schools are not always relevant, or adaptable, to the smaller school context (Starr & White, 2008). A vast majority of Australian schools could be described as small; and many are lead by principals who have significant classroom responsibilities. This is true in other places like the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

Being a teaching-principal is a complex activity, however Wilson & McPake (1998) noted that the people who lead small Scottish schools have no difficulty identifying the essential elements of their style, or what is required to maintain it effectively. A teaching-principal has a dual role, that of classroom teacher (often in a multi-level classroom) and school leader, and these roles often pull in opposite directions, leading to a style of small school management that Scottish researchers call 'situational management' (Wilson & McPake, 1998). Wilson & McPake (1998) argue that teaching-principals skilled in situational management are pragmatic people and can set priorities, they often use focused plans and lead their schools from within a team made up of teaching and non-teaching staff, where they make use of their professional teaching expertise. Successful teaching-principals utilise resources from within and without the school, and, while professionally outward looking they are environmentally conservative and are very aware of community constraints. Approaches used by teaching-principals include ring-fencing blocks of time in order to focus on one particular task and see it through to completion, delegating the task to someone else, or sharing the responsibility for the task with other staff and attempting to influence change via an instructional leadership approach (Collins, 2004). Situational managers rarely revisit or re-evaluate processes or the effects of changes they introduce (Wilson & McPake, 1998). The principals of small schools have to do the same daily tasks as principals of schools led by leadership teams and supported by office staff, but with less

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people (for a detailed discussion of the concerns of principals leading small schools in Victoria, Australia, see Starr & White (2008) which is available on-line). Collard (2004) observed that the daily tasks of operating a small school can inhibit innovation, which, he argued, was only possible in larger schools where delegating daily tasks freed up creative space for the leader. Starr & White (2008) disagree, noting small schools do create innovative solutions to significant challenges.

Stewardship (Sergiovanni 2006, 1992) is a derivative of Greenleaf's 'Servant Leadership' model. Servant leadership is about service not ego, community not self, altruism not selfishness, and it responds to moral, not bureaucratic imperatives (Crippen, 2005). Under the stewardship model schools are perceived as communities rather than organisations, and the leadership style privileges professionalism and empowerment, over management and control (Sergiovanni 2006, 1992). Servant leaders lead quietly, authentically, and with a high moral purpose (Fullan, 2003).

> *"They choose responsible, behind-the-scenes action over public heroism to resolve tough leadership challenges. These individuals don't fit the stereotype of the bold and gutsy leader, and they don't want to. What they want is to do the "right thing" for their organizations, their co-workers and themselves- inconspicuously and without casualties (p. 70)."*

Edgar Schein (1992) makes the point that implicit assumptions actually guide our behaviour, and that the culture defines for us what we should pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on, and what actions we should take in certain situations. Schein (1992) in his book about organisational culture and leadership identifies six primary mechanisms by which leaders foster culture in an organisation. These are about what the leader pays attention to; how they react to the unexpected; what is given priority; their public behaviour; how they respond to good performance, and how subordinates get along (or not) within the organisation. For this study these are identified as PEMs (primary embedding mechanisms).

PCT (personal construct theory) is a theory about persons and allows that events are anticipated, appreciated, appear meaningful and are classifiable only because the individual person has developed the means (constructs) to embed them within their personal understanding of the world and their own place in it (Bannister & Mair, 1968). Constructs provide a way for an individual to see that some events are like and, at the same time, unlike other things. Constructs can be flexible and modifiable, and liberating and restricting. Constructs are bi-polar and have an emergent and an implicit end but are not as black and white as might first be assumed. By engaging the participant in discussion of their construct many shades of grey can be determined. By focusing on anticipation rather than stimulus Kelly's theory is about prediction and motivation, and helps people to spell out their intentionality (Butt, 2004). Owens (1998) suggests that describing and assessing an organisational culture is difficult because some effects are subtle, unseen and so familiar to the insiders in the organisation that they are not even talked about. One way to uncover organisational culture is to talk at length with the people inside that organisation about what they think is important. Leaders show what is important by what they do and the circumstances in which they work (Schein, 1992). RGT (repertory grid table) provides the means for semi-structured interviews that lead to the generation of personal constructs. RGT can be used to generate both qualitative and quantitative data (Neimeyer, 1985).

THE AIM OF THIS RESEARCH

There have been a number of overseas studies which suggest that effective small-school administrators lead and manage their schools in a different way to the principals of large and very large schools (Collins, 2004; Early & Weindling, 2004; Southworth, 2002; Wilson & McPake, 1998) but the generalisation has not been fully resolved for an Australian context (Collard,

2004). The research is important because it has implications for how education systems prepare and support individuals taking up appointments and assisting small schools in implementing system-wide innovation and change. For the purposes of this research the expression of leadership did not need to be overtly dramatic, rather, it was in the daily expression of routine activity and interactions that the leader demonstrated his, or her, commitment to managing and changing the culture of their organisation (Schein, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2006).

RESEARCH APPROACH

Four experienced teaching-principals of small self-managed schools were interviewed about how they express their leadership in their working lives. The interviewees were two men (Tim and Terry) and two women (Tanya and Teresa). All were known to the author and volunteered to be involved in the study. These are not their real names. Each person completed three repertory grids described at Table 1 using 'Webgrid III' (see below).

Table 1: *Repertory grid element descriptors*

Tasks	*Professional Relationships*	*School Events*
1. A task that is time-consuming 2. A task that is particularly important to get right 3. A task that is particularly difficult to get right 4. A task that takes little time 5. A task that is not at all that important to get right 6. A task that is particularly easy to get right 7. A task that is formally delegated 8. A task that is informally delegated 9. A task that cannot be delegated 10. Any other task 11. Preferred pole 12. Implicit pole	1. Subordinate 2. Peer 3. Superior 4. More difficult parent 5. Less difficult parent 6. More difficult student 7. Less difficult student 8. School council member 9. A personal (non-school) relationship 10. Any other relationship 11. Preferred pole 12. Implicit pole	1. A recurrent event 2. A surprising event 3. An event which caused/causes division 4. An event which united/unites 5. An event in which you had no choice 6. An event which you orchestrated 7. A non-school event 8. Any other event 9. Preferred pole 10. Implicit pole

One grid was concerned with tasks, the other with professional relationships, whilst the third centred on school events. Each repertory grid provided element descriptors, based upon the research literature (Farrell, 2009b) to which the participant was to provide his or her own examples. For each grid the interviewees had to create nine personal constructs while the tenth construct was provided. The provided construct required the participants to rank each element in

the three grids for its perceived influence on their effectiveness or ineffectiveness as a teaching-principal. Correlations were then measured between the provided construct and all the others, and the significant correlations are reported here.

Webgrid III was an on-line product developed to create repertory grids and analyse the same; its main output are constructs and it is able to measure the correlation between constructs

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and elements (please note that Webgrid version V is now available). A significant correlation in Webgrid III is greater >±0.75. Significant correlations provided the structure for conversations with the participants where the author would seek their comments as to why particular constructs correlated. In this way the author was following the advice that the analysis that keeps you closest to the participant's own words should be followed first (Leach, Freshwater, Aldridge & Sunderland, 2001; Leitner, 1985). See Fransella, Bell & Bannister (2004) for a full description of repertory grid technique.

The generated constructs were created through randomised triadic elicitation (Fransella, Bell & Bannister, 2004). For this process, Webgrid III presents three elements of the grid to the participant who then must decide how two of the elements were similar to each other but different to the third. Webgrid III automatically scored the similar elements with a five and the element that was different with a one. During the construction of each construct the author asked the participants to identify which end of the construct they preferred. Every other element in the grid is then ranked against the same construct. It is in the scoring of each element against each construct that the subsequent measurement of the correlation between constructs can be made. It should be noted that a correlation implies an association, not cause and effect. When analysing each grid the author provided two more elements. These were named the preferred pole and implicit pole and each were scored according to the score given, by the participant, to the preferred and implicit ends of the construct.

RESULTS

The median number of teaching staff in the small schools studied was 1.05, not including the principal. All the schools made use of mobile specialist teachers for library and art teaching (these were provided by the education department). The median level of administrative support was three days a fortnight. The median enrolment for the participants was 16.5 students. The median length of the working week was 53 to 54 hours,

and the median length time spent teaching in a classroom was 18.75 hours out of 25 official classroom-contact hours.

Perceived effectiveness and primary embedding mechanisms (PEMs)

36 significant correlations were measured between the supplied construct *effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness* and the personal constructs of the four participants. 12 PEMs were generated of which seven were correlations with the 'preferred pole' and five were correlations with the 'implicit pole'.

– *Teresa* generated twelve significant correlations between her personal constructs and the provided construct *handling this task / relationship / event makes me effective – handling this task / relationship / event makes me ineffective.* Five of these constructs arose out of the professional relationships grid, four constructs were about school events, and three were constructs related to tasks. Teresa was focused on acting in a professional manner, on her school community, and on planning for its long-term future. Teresa was willing to use data and her personal and professional influence to make her case. Teresa generated six PEMs from the task grid, five of which significantly correlated with the 'implicit pole'. These were examples of trivial and mundane tasks like cleaning gutters, watering the garden, turning on computers, locking art sheds and answering emails. 'A task that was particularly important to get right' was the annual implementation plan (0.82), and this correlated with the 'preferred pole'. Teresa had 19 years with the teaching service and had been leading her current school for three years.

– *Tanya* had put in 30 years with the Victorian teaching service and was leading her second small school. Tanya had been a principal for 10 years and, prior to this, the assistant principal of a larger school for 12 months. Tanya generated 11 constructs that related to her

self-perception of her own effectiveness and ineffectiveness. Eight constructs were concerned with tasks, two related to professional relationships and one was concerned with school events. Tanya's perception of her own effectiveness related strongly to her ability to perform both strategic and mandated tasks well; staying focused on teaching and learning while maintaining strong relationships with school insiders, with whom she could set the agenda. Tanya created four PEMs of which three were concerned with relationships with school insiders like 'any other school relationship (her bursar)' (0.9), a 'subordinate (her teacher)' (0.85), and 'school councillor (the president)' (0.75), plus 'a task that is particularly important to get right (planning units of work)' (0.75).

- *Tim* had 20 years with the Victorian teaching service and half of these were as a small school principal. Tim was currently leading his second school. Tim generated seven significant correlations between his personal constructs and the provided construct. Three of these constructs related to professional relationships while two each were about tasks and school events. Tim was highly focussed on his school generally, and the students in particular. Tim used his individual relationships with school stakeholders to influence people in the direction of the school. Official planning documents were about keeping onside with the education department. One of these documents, the quadrennial strategic plan, was identified as a 'time-consuming task' and it correlated with Tim's 'implicit pole' (0.75) in the task grid. Producing a strategic plan was an activity Tim disliked and, it is likely his attitude would have been modelled to his school community.

- The most experienced member of the study was *Terry* with 35 years with the education department in Victoria, Australia. Terry who had led four schools and had been a leading teacher in one other adding up to 24 years of leadership experience in government school settings. Terry generated six significant cor-

relations between his personal constructs and the provided construct. Three of these significant constructs related to tasks, two to professional relationships and one to school events. Structure and familiarity provide the backdrop to Terry's effectiveness. Terry was conscious of the need for alignment between words and actions, and for his reaction to any crisis to be a considered one. In fact, Terry preferred to avoid the crisis altogether. He was careful about presenting a consistent face to his community. The small world occupied by the teaching-principal is one where the leader has an intimate feel for what is happening in his or her community. Terry generated one PEM from his school events grid and that was the correlation between the 'preferred pole' and 'an event that united (0.82)' and it was the annual Christmas concert.

16, 12 and eight significant correlations were measured for tasks, professional relationships and school events respectively.

Tasks

16 significant correlations between *perceived effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness* were measured from the task grid; of these, Tanya made half. Teresa and Tim produced three each while Terry produced two.

The eight significant task constructs created by Tanya were centred on compliance and teaching:

- A compulsory task vs. non-compulsory task (0.92);
- Relatively formal vs. relatively informal (0.89);
- Needs researching vs. no prior preparation needed (0.89);
- Affects the management of the school vs. does not affect the management of the school (0.86);
- Technical task vs. non-technical task (0.78); and
- Proactive task vs. reactive task (0.78);

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"Technical tasks are black and white; there are no shades of grey about what you need to do. You need to do all of your mandated tasks to run an effective school. It is better when you set the agenda and timelines etc. The annual implementation plan, the strategic plan, budgets, staff performance and development and unit plans. It's all about teaching and learning and teaching and learning are what effective schools are about". (Tanya)

– Affects teaching and learning vs. does not affect teaching and learning (0.78);
– Involves others vs. involves only me (0.78);

"It's your job to make sure everybody is up to scratch with their teaching and learning practice and that includes yourself if you are a teaching-principal. When you include others you can bounce ideas around and get collaborative". (Tanya)

Three significant constructs relating to tasks and Teresa's self-perception of her *effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness* were created. These constructs related to *thinking long term vs. short term (0.75)*, and *analysing vs. not analysing data (0.75)*. The most important task (0.77) related to *bringing about social change in her students* or *failing to do so*.

"Dealing with adverse student behaviour is a serious issue for us. The behaviour management program has major implications for how our school operates. Safety on the bus and in the yard and our classroom management are paramount. We have students who need to see the classroom is about learning not acting out." (Teresa)

Terry was focussed on tasks that were *concerned with the culture of the school vs. responding to departmental requirements (0.75)*, that required him to *exercise his mind rather than his body (0.78)*, and needed, a *considered response rather than a quick reaction (0.75)*.

"I have to back up my words with actions. If there is a breakdown betweens words and actions the school community loses faith in you as a leader". (Terry)

With respect to his *effectiveness and ineffectiveness* relating to tasks Tim was focussed on *tasks that significantly improve student outcomes vs. tasks, which did not (0.88).*

"My effectiveness is related to student outcomes. I spend a lot of time on improving student outcomes. 'I bust my arse!'" (Tim)

At the same time, Tim is aware that the system for which he works uses its own measures of effectiveness and he has a *professional rather than a personal obligation* to do these effectively (0.85).

"Key tasks are professional documents. It's how they keep score. You need to be good at them to be effective" (*Tim*)

The emergent themes created by the four participants around tasks were a concern for strategic longer-term outcomes that are measurable and require considerable investment in time and energy to plan and implement. Implicitly, the group, with the singular exception of Terry, are not attracted to those trivial tasks that require little preparation, but are necessary to the daily operation of their school. The participants were interested in tasks that involved and / or assisted other people, especially their students. Implicitly the group were averse to working alone, or completing mandated tasks that were management-focussed but unrelated to education.

Professional Relationships

Twelve significant correlations were measured between the supplied construct *perceived effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness* and personal constructs created by the participants. Teresa created the most constructs with five, Tim made three,

while Tanya and Terry made two and one construct respectively.

Teresa measured five significant correlations between the supplied construct around *effectiveness vs.* ineffectiveness and her own personal constructs. For Teresa professional relationships were effective when there was *more vs. less understanding about what was to be done (0.8),* and the interactions were *frequent vs. infrequent (0.8),* and were concerned with *professional vs. personal matters (0.78).* It was certainly appreciated when the relationship was not about *personal behaviour vs. about group behaviour (0.75).*

> *"People who kick up can end being your best supporters. At least you have 'real' conversations with them and you have to make your case. You can't assume that the people who just go along with you have bought into what you are doing... You need to provide time for professional development and 'real' discussion with your staff and they need to be involved with planning"* (Teresa)

For Tim, significant professional relationships were *about the individual not the whole school (0.78)* and about what *happened in school not out of it (0.75).* Tim perceived himself as being more effective when he could be *more influential vs. less influential (0.8).* This happened in the school not out of it.

> *"It's about the school. I work for [my] primary school not the department so any school-based relationship is very important. I just reckon that if you have positive individual relationships, personal or professional, that is a very good indicator of your ability to be effective".* (Tim)

Tanya identified having *professional relationships vs. non-professional relationships (0.78)* with *insiders who are directly involved with the school vs. outsiders (0.89)* as being a part of her own perception of effectiveness.

> *"They have an understanding of the department and also the school".* (Tanya)

Terry emphasised that his effectiveness was related to *frequent vs. infrequent contact (0.78)* with *school insiders vs. outsiders (0.78).*

> *"Frequent contact with insiders means my effectiveness as a cultural change agent is improved. Your relationships within the school must be strong; the community must know what you are on about".* (Terry)

The emergent themes around professional relationships indicate a strong preference for working with school insiders. These are people who understand the education system generally and the school itself in particular. The relationships are characterised by high frequency interactions with people who support the work of each of these school leaders. Implicitly, infrequent and / or impersonal interactions with school outsiders are to be avoided. While an interaction can be personal it should not be complex, and should be focussed on what is good for the school.

School events

There were eight significant correlations between the supplied construct around perceived *effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness* and personal constructs relating to school events. Teresa supplied half of the constructs while Tim made two and Tanya and Terry each provided one.

Four school events influenced Teresa's self-perception of her own *effectiveness and ineffectiveness.* Teresa felt a *professional vs. personal obligation (0.88)* to plan events. Teresa felt more effective when *she did the planning vs. working to the plans of other people (0.75).*

> *"Planning is one of those things that should be shared but due to circumstances I did most of the planning. Other staff had input but it depends on your fractional time teacher, who they are. You have to make the best of it. Because of our*

remoteness there wasn't a lot of choice and it can put constraints on you". (Teresa)

The planned events were more effective when they were *focussed on the school vs. the wider community (0.78).*

"While you need to relate to the wider community your focus should be on what is happening in your school. This is where you spend your time and your energy and your influence is strongest". (Teresa)

Teresa felt more effective vs. ineffective when the events were *about others vs. herself personally (0.91).*

"It's got to be about others. As a professional you have to focus on the people around you and less on yourself. You need to figure out what they need and how you will provide that". (Teresa)

Tim developed two constructs around effective school events. First, *events should have a student not a community focus (0.81)* and second, Tim wants to *control events rather than react to them (0.75).*

Tanya identified with the importance of *positive vs. negative* events and her *effective and ineffectiveness (0.75)* noting that events that work might get tried again.

Terry's strongest correlation with feeling *effective or ineffective* was centred on control and being involved with *highly structured vs. less structured events (0.81).*

"I like to have control. The stuff outside of my control I don't like; I don't think quickly enough on my feet. I need to know where I'm going and that I'm in charge. Things need to follow a particular path and have the appearance of being organised". (Terry)

The emergent themes around school events relate to a preference to be in control of those events. The participants preferred events that are focussed on the school and especially the student body. It emerged that that these participants want to be both personally and professionally engaged by these events. Implicitly the group do not like having to react to events, or be involved with events not directly concerned with the running of their school. There was a desire to ensure that events were supported by most of the wider community. Events where the focus was not generally educational but about individual behaviour is not desirable.

DISCUSSION

Experienced teaching-principals have a self-concept of themselves as professional and a clear and unambiguous idea what that means in a work sense. The experienced teaching-principals in this small study are:

− First and foremost classroom teachers,
− Effective users of time, and
− The controllers and nurturers of a shared agenda.

Based on medians the amount of time spent in classroom by the participants was just under 19 hours a week. This equated to about one third of the working week (53.5 hours) being spent in the classroom. Collins (2004) noted less experienced (first and second year) teaching-principals were likely to work 64 hours each week. Murdoch & Schiller (2002) observed that teaching-principals enjoyed teaching and it was one of the highlights of the job. The participants in this study worked in classrooms for 75% of the time of a fulltime classroom teacher and had learnt to balance the demands of teaching a multi-level classroom and administering a school (Murdoch & Schiller, 2002). Farrell (2009a), an experienced teaching-principal and the author of the present study, observed that his ability to deal quickly and effectively with events that are not directly concerned with the school's own business was part of his effectiveness, saying his main focus was educating a well-known group of children. Other studies, using repertory grid technique (Jones & Connelly, 2001; Farrell, 2009b) of school leaders with relatively low, or no, teaching loads, indi-

cate that their focus on students is less about day-to-day teaching and more about educational-management, and as a result, monitoring teacher and student activity is an important part of their work. However, a teaching-principal, with his or her own teaching load, may be unable to adequately supervise and support other classroom teachers, and one poor teacher, working with the same children over a number of years could have an adverse impact on the educational outcomes of the school (Murdoch & Schiller, 2002; Reid, Bullock & Howarth, 1988). It should also be noted that changes made in the principal's own classroom are both direct and immediate.

Southworth (2002) observed that being time-poor was a feature of the professional life of the teaching-principal in small British schools. Wilson & McPake (1998) observed that small school principals in Scotland are pragmatic situational managers who deal with many matters personally and so have to be able to prioritise (Tanya). In this study it was noted that experienced teaching-principals quickly and efficiently handle easy tasks (Tanya), and even though they may be averse to the mundane and trivial (Teresa), it helps if they are comfortable with such routines (Terry). The time-consuming tasks for the teaching-principal group in the present study tended to be concerned with collecting and interpreting data, strategic planning, and reporting to the department and community on student outcomes. Tim noted that these key documents were how the system kept score and measured your effectiveness but he was averse to the example he provided (the quadrennial strategic plan), while Teresa and Tanya both enjoyed planning.

A study of the work of school administrators from Northern Ireland suggested that school administrators without a high teaching load spend a significant amount of time on tasks of little value (Neil, Carlisle, Knipe & McEwan, 2001). The authors of that Northern Ireland study further suggested that some school administrators do not delegate tasks as much as they might. Delegation was not an alternative available to the teaching-principals in the present study. Wilson & McPake (1998) noted that small school heads tend to share tasks rather than delegate because

of a lack of expertise. Farrell (2009a) noted that not every skill set was covered by his small staff but argued that the flexibility inherent in being a tiny organisation more than offset any disadvantage. Farrell (2009a) did observe he had very good staff but this level of commitment and support is not always available in all small schools. In this study Teresa commented on her inability to rely on staff due to school remoteness.

Leading a very small school means being responsible for everything, and being responsible for everything means you need to control the agenda, but not in a way that isolates the other stakeholders in the school. This is done through thorough planning, preferably with others, who have a shared understanding of where the school is going. Shared understanding is achieved through frequent contact with school insiders, where there is no discontinuity between the leader's words and actions (Terry), and staying on message. The mission of the school is kept deceptively simple and measureable. Experienced teaching-principals work hard to gain the trust of their community who, for their part, expect that the leader will do the right thing by the school (Farrell, 2009a). However, maintaining control over the agenda can be difficult. Starr & White (2008) recorded palpable tension felt by rural principals over having to deal with externally imposed management tasks. For Terry, the most experienced leader interviewed, the annual Christmas concert was his PEM. It's organised, it is structured, it's about kids, and it communicates what the school is about.

The participants in this small, but intense, study perceive themselves as professionals, and for Sergiovanni (1992) professionalism is more than mere competence, it includes virtuous activity. Sergiovanni (1992) says the 'virtuous' professional is committed to agreed-upon values and purposes, and to ensuring other community stakeholders stay true to these. Sergiovanni (1992) says professionalism should be intrinsic rather than imposed and, while the participants in this study recognised that it was their duty to get the official documentation done on time, it was quite apparent that they each felt a personal obligation to their school. For these four teaching-principals, their expectations of their own

professional behaviour included planning for the long and short term (Terry, Tim, Tanya, Teresa), using data (Teresa and Tanya) and matching words with actions (Terry). It was important to ensure that events have the appearance of being organised (Terry) and that people know what you are on about (Teresa, Tanya and Terry). The group identified with the notion that their school was a community and their relations with school insiders were critical to their effectiveness (Teresa, Tanya, Tim and Terry).

CONCLUSION

This paper is important because relatively few studies exist which examine the work of 'experienced' teaching-principals who lead very small schools. Being so small it is unrealistic to generalise these findings any further however, the study does suggest that the following constructs might be usefully supplied to participants in future, similar, studies of the work of school principals:

- *Managing time is most important vs. Managing physical resources is most important.*
- *I am a classroom teacher vs. I am an educational manager.*
- *I am the leader of an organisation vs. I am the leader of a community.*

The education department in Victoria, Australia has done a lot of work in recent times to simplify the administrative requirements of running a school (Farrell, 2009b), however the demands made on the leaders of small schools are complex and intense (Starr & White, 2008) and the education system expects the teaching-principal to manage all tasks, large and small, important and trivial, in a competent manner. A specialist small-school coach would be useful to newly appointed teaching-principals (Cleary-Gilbert et al., 2008) especially in the effective management of time and prioritising tasks. It would be especially helpful if the teaching-principal, and his or her fractional time teacher, could get specific support around teaching in a multi-level classroom. To gain control of the school's agenda in

an inclusive way, Sergiovanni's (1992) stewardship model, with its emphasis on community and professionalism, has much to recommend it as a template for individuals appointed to a teaching-principalship.

The present study suggests that these experienced teaching-principals see themselves and the work they do in a particular way. This self-concept may have implications for their system managers introducing large-scale changes and innovations. For these school leaders in the present study any changes introduced by the system to which they belong are likely to be anticipated in terms of what they may mean for their students, their current school priorities, and the potential effect on their school community.

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