

KIL04172

Leadership for rural school–community partnerships

Sue Kilpatrick and Susan Johns
University of Tasmania

Dr Sue Kilpatrick
Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania
Locked Bag 1313, Launceston TAS 7250
Phone: (03) 63243018 Fax: (03) 63243040 Email: Sue.Kilpatrick@utas.edu.au

Abstract

This paper presents a model for examining effective leadership for rural school–community partnerships, derived from Australian research supported by the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation. The research team investigated effective school–community partnerships in five different Australian rural locations. Four government and one independent school featured in the study. Partnership effectiveness was confirmed by seeking advice from a range of experts including State, Commonwealth, independent school and Catholic education authorities, as well as rural education professionals. The particular focus of the study was on the community outcomes of such partnerships.

The model is consistent with, but further develops, earlier partnership models. It uses the leadership process, rather than the ‘leader’, as the unit of analysis. The model outlines a five-stage process of partnership development: trigger, initiation, development, maintenance and sustainability. While the stages of the process appear to be consistent across study sites, the way in which the model is implemented differs according to context, with factors such as the level of maturity of the school–community partnership influencing the process. The flexibility of the model, in terms of better understanding the contextualised nature of educational leadership, suggests it has broader application beyond rural school–community partnerships.

Background

The research reported here is one aspect of the findings from a project that investigated the nature and extent of the contribution of rural schools to their communities, beyond traditional forms of education of young people. The project was funded by the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation, which recognised that the agricultural industry and farm households in rural Australia rely on rural communities to provide social and economic infrastructure and services, including education. This project followed from the National Farmers’ Federation study of rural communities in each state (Harrison 1997) that found community concern with the decline of rural communities and the associated reduction in provision of services, especially health, education and banking services.

The findings from the project indicate that school–community partnerships deliver a variety of positive outcomes for youth, and the community. Business and industry benefited from training initiatives for adults as well as youth. Increased retention of youth in their rural communities is evident. There are many examples of positive physical and environmental outcomes for communities. All the communities identified cultural and recreational benefits from sharing of physical and human (teacher and student expertise) school resources, and most described economic benefits in terms of the school as a key employer and consumer of local goods and services. These outcomes occur because rural school–community partnerships facilitate interaction through which social capital is built, leading to increased individual and community capacity. Developing effective

school–community partnerships requires rural schools and communities to learn together how to adapt, mould and shape policy to support their vision, and to risk take when necessary. Effective leadership for school–community partnerships is a collective process through which school and community together develop and enact shared visions that reflect their collective needs and collective future, and it is this aspect of the project findings that is considered in this paper. Those interested in other aspect of the findings are referred to the full project report (Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk & Prescott 2002) and other papers stemming from the project (Kilpatrick, Johns & Mulford 2003, Johns 2003, Kilpatrick, Falk, Johns & Smith 2002, Johns, Kilpatrick, Mulford & Falk 2001)).

This paper first reviews literature about theories of leadership and leadership in the contexts of communities and education. A description of the project methodology is followed by an analysis of the leadership processes for five school-community partnerships. A model for examining effective leadership for rural school–community partnerships is presented. The paper draws on the project report and other papers stemming from the project.

Views of leadership

There are three main theoretical views of leadership according to Barker (1997). Traditional leadership literature regards leadership as an *ability*, or set of traits or behaviours that can be taught. Barker argues that this view confuses leadership with management. Leadership is about change, whereas management is about creating stability. Barker’s second view is leadership as a *relationship* that emphasises interactions between people. According to this view, espoused by Rost (1991, 1993), leaders and collaborators work together to affect change. Both leaders and collaborators bring resources to the relationship that are used to accomplish change. Leaders are distinguished from collaborators by their possession of power resources which they use to exercise greater influence.

The third view is that leadership is a dynamic and collaborative *process* in which leadership roles are not defined. Here, leadership is a group process rather than an activity dominated by a designated ‘leader’. Through the leadership process, which involves influencing, compromising and sacrificing, a new shared vision for the future is gradually developed to reflect the collective needs of the group (Barker 1997). Leadership is therefore created as individuals and groups interact and collaborate, and depends on the situation (Falk & Smith 2003). The concept of leadership as a process represents a more recent leadership paradigm which challenges thinking about traditional leadership practices and training. Specifically, it challenges some earlier leadership models that have focused on ‘the leader’ rather than on the situation that leaders must enable (Falk & Mulford 2001). The speed and nature of change have re-focused our attention on the situations that demand a leadership of enablement, rather than on the ‘person’ themselves.

Community leadership

Gardner highlights some of the main requirements for leadership under the new circumstances in his introduction to a summary of issues and challenges facing community leadership:

What we need, and what seems to be emerging in some of our communities, is something new—networks of responsibility drawn from all segments, coming together to create a wholeness that incorporates diversity. The participants are at home with change and exhibit a measure of shared values, a sense of mutual obligation and trust. Above all, they have a sense of responsibility for the future of the whole city and region. (Peirce & Johnson 1997, p. vi)

The community context in which the leadership skills are practiced and embedded is becoming more and more crucial to the wellbeing and viability of communities (Flora et al. 1997). Leadership in many communities continues to be an evolving process, and one which is becoming more distributed, dispersed and diffused rather than concentrated in one or few hands. Not only are leaders heavily dependent on followers, but also, followers can become leaders (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Many other writers on leadership and community development have supported this stance (Flora et

al. 1997; Lambert 1998; Senge 1999). Leadership is being perceived in terms of the actions required under varying conditions to achieve a group's goals, and how members take part in these various group actions. From these perspectives, we can redefine leadership as those acts that help the group achieve its goals. In his book *The Tao of Leadership* Heider (1985) puts it concisely when he states that 'the wise leader is not collecting a string of successes' but rather is helping others to find, in themselves, his or her own successor (p. 161).

Research indicates that rural communities in which change has been effectively implemented display a number of similarities, in terms of their participatory approach to decision making, cooperative community spirit, and deliberate transition of power to youth. These communities make and implement their own decisions whilst at the same time recognising the importance of external resources (Cavaye 2000). In those communities where sustainable change has been effected, Australian research highlighted how the leadership process facilitated the articulation of a common purpose or community vision, initiated commitment to the vision, and encouraged community participation in enacting the vision (Sorensen & Epps 1996).

Lane and Dorfman (1997) argued that effective community development is a collaborative process which contributes to the development and use of social capital. Social capital can be defined as the norms and networks or relationships that allow individuals to work together to produce mutually beneficial outcomes (Falk & Kilpatrick 2000). Lane and Dorfman identified five dimensions of an effective community development process: collaborative and integrated involvement and participation; peer-based relationships among diverse stakeholders which are facilitated by a collaborative leader; multiple partners and multiple partnership levels; the community as the change agent; and goals that are both process oriented (building social capital) and task oriented (using social capital to achieve goals). They conceived of the community development process as consisting of a number of sequential steps or stages. By conceiving of leadership as a collective process through which a shared vision is developed and enacted, the similarities between Barker's (1997) third view of leadership (as a process) and the community development process can be analysed.

Leadership for learning

Research into effective educational leadership supports the need to foster collective leadership processes in order to bring about and support sustainable change within educational settings. For example, Sergiovanni (1994) argued that sustainable school improvement efforts revolve around the concept of the school as a community rather than an organisation, and noted that an outcome of community building in schools is strengthening of other community institutions such as the family and the neighbourhood (community). In support of this view, Lambert (1998) argued that educational leadership is a reciprocal learning process amongst people who share goals and visions. Inherent in this process is active participation by teachers and parents, which is likely to come about through the redistribution of power and authority within the school, and the development of a culture in which everyone has the right and potential to be a leader. The notion of reciprocal leadership is also supported in the community development literature (see, for example, Langone & Rohs 1995).

The view of leadership as a collective, reciprocal process builds on Burns' (1978) transforming leadership, which he described as 'the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers' (p. 425). Central to this definition is that those involved in the process must either have mutual or similar goals, in other words, commitment to change.

More recent educational leadership research (see, for example, Leithwood 1994, Silins & Mulford 2002) indicates that Burns' (1978) concept of commitment is central to what is now generally referred to as transformational leadership. This research argues that a transformational model of leadership facilitates effective school reform. Transformational leadership practices of school

Principals and other formal school leaders include the development of a widely shared school vision, developing a collaborative culture which supports the school's vision, fostering the commitment and capacity of staff, distributing responsibility for leadership, and supporting collaboration with appropriate resourcing including time and funding (Leithwood 1994). Of particular relevance is the work of Silins and Mulford (2002), which established a positive relationship between transformational leadership practices within schools and the extent of distributive leadership.

Chrislip and Larson (1994), from their studies of a number of cases of community collaboration in North America, identified a need to foster widespread community participation, and form institutional partnerships between groups such as schools, Chambers of Commerce, business and industry and government entities. Credibility and openness of the leadership process was one of the key elements of successful collaboration. Effective leadership for partnerships between schools and communities therefore can be expected to involve many 'leaders' in a collaborative process.

About the project

With funding from the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, the research team conducted five case studies of schools' contributions to rural communities around Australia (Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk & Prescott 2002). The broad purpose of the study was to investigate the role of rural schools in building community social capital, which is defined as networks and shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. There was a specific focus on the role of leadership in building social capital. The three objectives of this study were to examine the extent and nature of the contribution of rural schools to their communities' development beyond traditional forms of education of young people; to investigate the ways in which the modes of leadership of the school and community leaders influence the extent and nature of the school's contribution to the community, and to consider the constraints to schools being put to other uses.

This qualitative research used a case study methodology, based on ethnographic principles. Case studies allow in-depth investigation of inter-related factors and the processes that link and shape them (Burns, 2000). Sites were selected on the basis of information from expert sources who identified effective rural school-community partnerships known to them. Over 100 schools and communities perceived as having excellent school-community partnerships were nominated for the study. Of these, five case study sites were selected. The criteria for selection were diversity in terms of: population size and background of community; degree of remoteness; industry base; school size, type and characteristics, and nature and stage of maturity of the school-community partnership.

Table 1: Characteristics of five Australian case study sites

Site/isolation	Pop	School details
<i>Meander (Tas)</i> (not remote)	258	<i>Meander Primary School</i> , K-6 89 students Houses community online access centre
<i>Walla Walla (NSW)</i> (not remote)	606	<i>St Paul's College</i> , Lutheran co-educational boarding school 240 students (80 boarders) School farm, equine centre
<i>Cowell (SA)</i> (semi-remote)	1241	<i>Cowell Area School</i> , R-12 192 students School oyster lease, School boarding hostel
<i>Cooktown (Qld)</i> (remote)	3147	<i>Cooktown State School</i> , P-12 420 students (approx 30% Indigenous) Services 5 feeder primary schools
<i>Margaret River (WA)</i> (semi-remote)	9953	<i>Margaret River Senior High School</i> , Years 8-12 600 students Services 7 primary schools (4 government, 3 private)

	School farm, including vineyard
--	---------------------------------

Data were collected using three techniques: semi-structured interviews with a variety of school and wider community members; written documentation from school and community sources, and observation, allowing for triangulation of data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviewees were selected from four groups: students, school staff including the Principal, parents and other community individuals, and representatives of industry and community groups. Interviewee selection was informed by key informants in the sites (usually the Principal in consultation with other school staff such as the VET Coordinator). The resulting data are both rich and intensive, enhancing their transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Analysis of school-community partnerships

Most of the school–community partnerships reviewed in this study that form the basis of the discussion on leadership, relate to the planning and implementation of specific programs linking school to community, such as the development of a VET-in-schools program or a community online access centre or an environmental project. This in no way suggests that ongoing school–community partnerships, such as the sharing of school facilities and resources, are of less importance. In fact, evidence from our case study sites suggests strongly that schools which have a balance between specific program linkages and ongoing linkages are well positioned to make extensive contributions to their communities. However, leadership is primarily concerned with bringing about change, as compared with management which focuses on managing change (Barker 1997). The specific school–community programs identified in this study have all been responsible for effecting change on a community-wide basis. They are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: School-community linkages

Site	School–community linkages
<i>Meander (Tas)</i>	Online access centre Environment centre Arts programs
<i>Walla Walla (NSW)</i>	School farm Equine centre Vocational Education and Training (VET) in schools Youth internship program
<i>Cowell (SA)</i>	School oyster lease School boarding hostel VET in schools aquaculture course Arts and environment projects
<i>Cooktown (Qld)</i>	VET in schools
<i>Margaret River (WA)</i>	School farm, including vineyard Structured workplace learning State Emergency Service cadets Volunteer reading program School recycling program

In analysing the influence of leadership on the development of school–community partnerships, the leadership process has been selected as the unit of analysis, rather than the traits, attributes or styles of those individuals designated as ‘leaders’. Only by analysing the leadership process can we capture the interactions between ‘leaders’ and the various contexts that arise as the process progresses. Analysing leadership in this way is in keeping with the direction of recent educational and community development leadership research which raises concerns about the limitations of much

traditional leadership theory because of its focus on ‘the leader’, as discussed above in the brief review of the leadership research literature.

The leadership process begins with a *trigger* stage, which relates to the identification of a problem or opportunity for change that impacts on, or is likely to impact on a community. This is followed by *initiation*, in which informal processes come into play in order to mobilise resources to address the problem or opportunity. Next comes *development*, which relates to the implementation of formal processes to tackle the problem or develop the opportunity, usually some form of partnership between groups or institutions on the community. At this stage more players become committed to the intervention/project. The fourth and fifth stages cover *maintenance* and *sustainability* of the project. During these stages effective management of the project is facilitated by processes and resources that have been put in place, and the partners review and renew their vision and goals and scan for opportunities and new problems in relation to the intervention. Once the leadership process has reached the sustainability stage, there are two options: (1) as a result of the leadership process, amendments or modifications to the existing school–community linkage are identified, and the process goes back to the initiation stage to begin the process of building support for the proposed changes, and/or (2) as a result of the leadership process, the need to develop a new school–community linkage is triggered and a new process begins from the trigger stage. The leadership process is therefore cyclical.

In Table 3 (following pages), our five-stage model of the leadership process has been applied to one school–community linkage from each of the five study sites. It shows how the leadership process is determined by the situation or problem at hand, which calls for different actors with different attributes to become involved at different stages of the process, and for the roles of some actors to change during the leadership process.

The importance of widespread school and community involvement in the leadership process when implementing school–community partnerships is clearly illustrated by the analysis in Table 3. The five examples of school–community partnerships show a process for each school–community linkage where leadership roles are distributed among people inside and outside the schools, and among formal school and community leaders and others. Effective leadership of school–community partnerships is not the responsibility of one or several designated ‘leaders’, but is the collective responsibility of the school and community, and depends on the availability and willingness of a wide variety of school and community individuals to involve themselves in the leadership process.

The ingredients of the leadership process for success of partnerships *vary* according to the context, the resources available to the collaborative effort, the organisations and groups involved and their goals. Formal leaders (such as community body office holders and Principals) are key players, but others, people we have termed ‘boundary crossers’ who speak the language of the different groups or institutions and the broader community, are also important. As projects evolve, leadership passes from a core initiating group to a larger group, representative of the diversity of the community.

At the same time, the leadership process is facilitated by certain individuals within each community, most notably school Principals boundary crossers, who provide a bridge between school and community. Principals legitimise potential school–community partnerships, and play an important role in ensuring there are ongoing opportunities for interaction for all community members, as well as facilitating the development of structures and processes that foster group visioning. Their transformational leadership practices empower others as effective players in the leadership process. These activities are complemented by boundary crossers, who legitimise potential school–community partnerships within the wider community, and whose communication and interpersonal skills strengthen the relationship between the school and community.

Table 3: Analysis of the leadership process in relation to five different school–community partnerships

Meander online access centre

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Council member/relief teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identified opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boundary crosser with external networks • vision of School Council member/relief teacher • understanding of school and community values and vision
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Council member • Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • took initiative in Principal's absence • openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks • support of Principal • approached school staff then school council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • established way of working, and community vision where school is at centre of community, helped at this stage
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Council member • Online Access Centre Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gaining support of stakeholders (build common purpose around identified opportunity) • accessing resources • formalise leadership with a committee (mainly community members) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boundary crosser had credibility in community • previously established ability to work as inclusive school/community team
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Access Centre Coordinator • Online Access Centre Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring opportunities provided for all sections of community to use centre • communication and linking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinator is original initiator (boundary crosser) • Committee's role mainly to support centre coordinator
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Access Centre Coordinator • Principal • Online Access Centre Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeking opportunities to involve non-using groups • seeking opportunities to ensure continuity of management and financial viability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publicity

Walla Walla youth intern initiative

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Pastor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identified problem • identified Lutheran Church resources • identified boarding house resource • discussed idea with Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastor's external networks • Pastor's vision
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Pastor • Principal and School Board of Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks • involving Shires and other pastors • support of Board and Principal • supporting people and facilitating them to follow through with their ideas • building common purpose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastor's idea fitted with philosophy of school • Pastor's local networks
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Pastor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • formalisation of partnership • locating and accessing resources 	
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Pastor • Youth intern project management committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring youth interns • communication and linking 	
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Pastor • Management committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expanding initiative to other localities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resources provided by Church and school

Cowell aquaculture VET project

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local oyster grower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identified opportunity approached Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> boundary crosser on School Council oyster grower's vision
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal and Deputy Principal Oyster grower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks support of Principal managing process of reconciling competing values and shaping values appropriate to vision inclusive, involving all stakeholders, including youth building on existing community attitudes and values using community networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> oyster grower had external links (to TAFE and university) stage took several years lack of continuity of school staff slowed process
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aquaculture Committee (community, not school, the leaders) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inclusive community involvement on Committee two-way communication channels locating resources looking to others with similar experiences (Cleve School) matching community leadership and management style (by committee) with project management style 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> second, more inclusive, committee took ownership of program (name changed from Aquaculture Committee to aquaculture Board of Management)
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aquaculture Committee Aquaculture Liaison Officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communication and linking working with diverse internal and external stakeholders (bridging ties) 	
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aquaculture Committee (community, industry and school) Aquaculture Liaison Officer Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reaffirming networks and goals scanning for new opportunities and problems related to aquaculture seeking and acting on feedback from stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> publicity assists sustainability and external willingness to be involved and fund project when sustainability threatened, process returned to initiation stage

Cooktown Step Ahead VET in schools program

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identified need • involved Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers' vision • two teachers with conflicting views on how to implement solution to problem
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal and 2 teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks • support of Principal for idea • supporting 2 conflicting teachers • developing people and facilitating them to follow through with their ideas • accessing external networks for information • involving community opinion leaders • build on existing networks • interpersonal communication • developing vision 	
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 teachers • community opinion leaders • Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • locating and accessing resources • gaining trust and support of stakeholders • coming to share the vision, especially with employers • deliberate inclusive community involvement • working with external stakeholders • formalisation of school–community partnership (committee) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meetings held in community, not school • time spent vetting employers to ensure they shared the vision
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management Committee • VET Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • on-going liaison between stakeholders (business, Indigenous communities, students) through Management Committee • continued high level of commitment by stakeholders 	
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management Committee • VET Coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looking for new opportunities (school-based apprenticeships) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinator a community, not teacher/school, person (boundary crosser) • publicity of success

Margaret River vocational program

Stage	Leaders	Leadership process	Other influencing factors
<i>Trigger</i> (problem/opportunity identification)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET Coordinator • Business Enterprise Centre (BEC) Facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identification of opportunity that fitted with school philosophy and new direction for Business Enterprise Centre • approach Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • common timing of opportunity and BEC refocusing • vision of Principal shared by teachers
<i>Initiation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET Coordinator • BEC Facilitator • Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • openness to new ideas and willingness to take risks • support of formal school leadership • recognising common purpose of school and community 	
<i>Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET Coordinator • BEC Facilitator • Vocational program management committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessing funding using external networks • gaining trust and support of stakeholders • involving all stakeholders • formalisation of process • developing people and facilitating them to follow through with their ideas • coming to share a standard of excellence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gaining trust and support of stakeholders especially important because VET Coordinator was new to community
<i>Maintenance</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET Coordinator • Employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • empowering all stakeholders to take control rather than Management Committee • collaborative problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stakeholders have taken control and program is self-managing
<i>Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VET Coordinator • Employers • Principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • looking out for threats and opportunities 	

The key elements of the leadership processes are highlighted as the Meander online access centre and Cooktown Step Ahead programs as they are described in more detail below.

Meander online access centre

The Meander Community Online Access Centre was set up in what had, up to then, been the Principal's office at Meander Primary School at a time when the Education Department was encouraging the development of technology in schools. However, the story of the online centre is far more than one of just being in the right place at the right time. It is one of a close, reciprocal partnership between school and community, and of enthusiastic and committed leadership by community members and school staff, dedicated to meeting the needs of a small rural community.

The key mover was a resident parent and teacher with IT skills who had become aware of a lack of resources at local and school libraries; he is an example of what we have termed a boundary crosser. His observation of the need for information resources combined with the funding opportunity was the *trigger* for this school-community linkage. As the boundary crosser was also chair of the School Council, his credibility within that group and his enthusiasm for the project were key factors at the *initiation* stage, where staff and parental support for the Centre was secured. The Principal enthusiastically gave practical support to the idea, offering the use of his office and school administrative support (identifying resources). In the *development* stage, funding was secured, and a management committee was formed comprising a mix of community, parent and staff members covering a wide cross-section of interests. The funding is used to employ a coordinator, who initially was the same person who triggered the establishment of the centre. A coordinator and the committee continue to manage the online access centre (*maintenance* stage).

With the online centre so reliant on the input and enthusiasm of one person, the original coordinator, there could be concern about its ongoing viability should that person move on. The original coordinator was well aware of the need for a *sustainability* aspect to the leadership process, and saw having the centre 'under the wing of the school' and being well supported by the community as key to the long term future of the facility.

The online centre, as the first school-based centre in Tasmania, has become a source of pride for the community. Meander Primary school students are regular users; however, the benefits to the community and school of having such a centre are much greater. The centre has brought into the school people who would not otherwise have contemplated accessing computers, and given them skills to cope with change. Community members have used the facility for business purposes, and to undertake secondary or tertiary education by distance.

Cooktown Step Ahead program

The initiative for a VET-in-schools program came from two teachers at Cooktown State School concerned with the failure of the mainstream curriculum to cater for certain students (the *trigger*). From the beginning the school recognised the importance of developing the initiative as a partnership between school and community, if the problem was to be dealt with effectively.

A 'think tank' was organised by the school, which prominent community members representing the diverse industry and community groups in the region, were invited to attend. From this meeting, broad-based community support for the program was guaranteed. In a community used to helping itself, the level of community commitment was high from the beginning. As well as community support, funding and support from government agencies was critical to the implementation of *Step Ahead*. At this *initiation* stage of the leadership process, school staff and Committee members used their networks to build relationships with key external sources.

To formalise the school-community partnership, a Management Committee was formed, comprising representatives of all stakeholder groups, including the school, local council, the construction, mining, pastoral and hospitality industries, Indigenous groups, and parents. Committee members

were described as ‘a very very powerful group of quite energetic and creative people’. The formation of the Management Committee was significant because it facilitated on-going liaison between stakeholders and clients and feedback for guiding program development. This is the *development* stage of the leadership process.

Committee members used their networks to canvas other employers within their respective industry groups to offer work placements to students. The Committee continues to provide ongoing links and regular communication between employers, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community, and the school, and is actively involved in decision making for the program (*maintenance* stage).

The Committee later went on to develop a school-based apprenticeship program, following identification of a new opportunity, in the *sustainability* stage of this cyclical school-community leadership process.

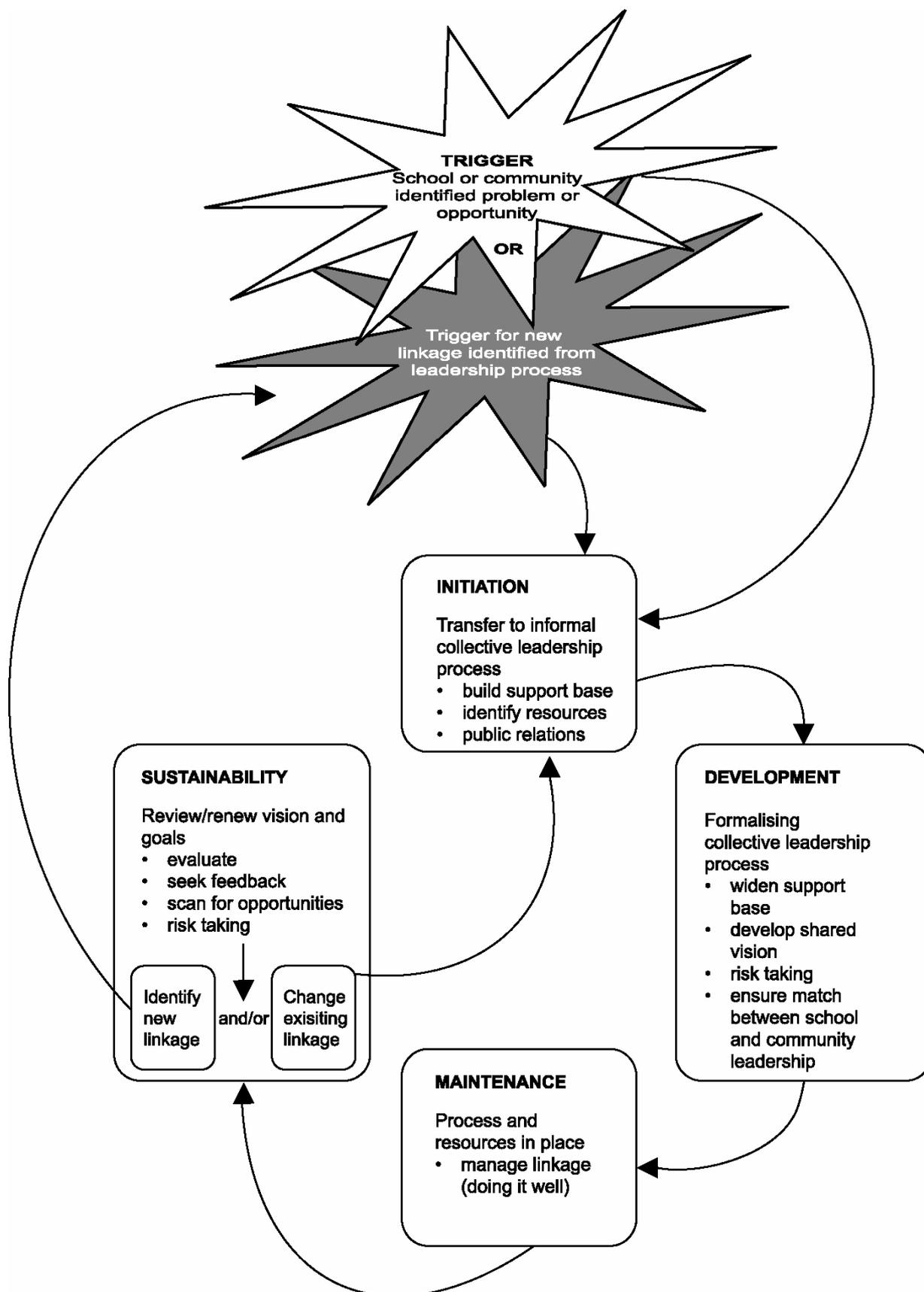
A model of the leadership process for effective school–community partnerships

Evidence from each of the study sites indicates that effective leadership for implementing school–community partnerships goes further than involving or consulting with all stakeholders during the decision making process. Rather, effective leadership for school–community partnerships is a collective process during which school and community go about developing and realising shared visions. The stages of the leadership process for implementing school–community partnerships illustrate how leadership gradually shifted from being the responsibility and domain of individuals early in the process, to a collective or group responsibility as the leadership process continued. That is, the vision of individuals at the trigger stage gradually shifted to a shared group (school and community) vision during the initiation and development stages. Because the group had developed a sense of ownership and common purpose in relation to the linkage, they had a vested interest in ensuring its maintenance and sustainability.

Figure 1 summarises our analysis as a model of the five stage, cyclical leadership process in implementing school–community partnerships.

The project findings clearly show that the level of maturity of the school–community partnership dictates how schools and communities go about developing and sustaining new linkages. Key players in the leadership process tend to adopt a more directive and initiating role in developing school–community partnerships in communities which do not have a strong history of working together (that is, in communities at the early stage of developing school–community partnerships), compared with the more facilitative role adopted by key players in schools and communities with well-developed linkages, such as Meander. This indicates that there is no ‘one size fits all’ process for developing effective school–community partnerships. Rather, the leadership process is contextual, as Falk and Smith (2003) propose, in that it must take into account issues such as the school’s and community’s history of working together, the availability, capacity and willingness of people to play a role in the leadership process, and the nature of the problem or opportunity that is driving the school–community linkage. The maturity of school–community partnerships is explored in Kilpatrick, Mulford and Johns (2003).

Figure 1: Implementing school–community partnerships: Stages of the leadership process



Conclusion

Leadership for effective partnerships is a shared process where many people play a part, consistent with the writings from education and community development (for example Chrislip & Larson 1994, Barker 1997, Lane & Dorfman 1997). Formal leaders (such as Principals and office holders in community bodies) are key players, but others, people we have termed 'boundary crossers' who speak the language of the school/educational institution and the community, are also important. As projects evolve, leadership passes from a core initiating group to a larger group, representative of the diversity of the community. Effective leadership of partnerships is the collective responsibility of the schools and whole community who must actively seek opportunities to involve all sectors of the community, including those who would not normally have contact with schools. Effective leadership depends on the availability and willingness of a wide variety of individuals to involve themselves in the leadership process. There is no 'one size fits all' process for developing effective partnerships. Rather, the leadership process is contextual, in that it must take into account issues such as the school's and community's history of working together, the availability, capacity and willingness of people to play a role in the leadership process, and the nature of the problem or opportunity that is driving the school–community linkage.

A key finding from the research in is that leadership is about an intervention or linkage (which may, for example, take the form of a project) rather than being solely the province of a single leader or a leader's characteristics. No single leadership style is adequate to meet the requirements of the whole range of engagements implicated in a leadership intervention. There is scope for a number of individuals with a range of leadership styles indicating that an effective leadership process is about shared leadership.

References

- Barker, R.A. 1997, How can we train leaders if we do not know what leadership is? *Human Relations*, 50, 4, pp. 343–62.
- Burns, J.M. 1978, *Leadership*. Harper & Row, New York.
- Burns, R. 2000, *Introduction to Research Methods*. 4th edn, Longman, Frenchs Forest, NSW.
- Cavaye, J. 2000, *Our Community Our Future: A guide to rural community development*. Department of Primary Industries, Brisbane.
- Chrislip, D. & Larson, C. 1994, *Collaborative Leadership: How citizens and civic leaders can make a difference*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- CRLRA 2001, *Building Dynamic Learning Communities: Ten regional case studies*. Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, University of Tasmania, Launceston.
- Falk, I. & Kilpatrick, S. 2000, What is social capital? A study of rural communities, *Sociologica Ruralis*, 40, 1, pp. 87–110.
- Falk, I. & Mulford, W. 2001, Enabling leadership: A new community leadership model. In I. Falk (Ed.), *Learning to Manage Change: Developing rural communities for a local-global millennium*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.
- Falk, I. & Smith, T. 2003, *Leadership in vocational education and training: Leadership by design, not by default*. National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.
- Flora, J., Sharp, J., Flora, C., & Newlon, B. 1997, Entrepreneurial social infrastructure and locally initiated economic development in the non-metropolitan United States, *Sociological Quarterly*, 38, 4, pp. 623–645.
- Harrison, H. 1997, *Trends in the Delivery of Rural Health, Education and Banking Services*, National Farmers' Federation, Canberra.
- Heider, J. 1985, *The Tao of Leadership: Leadership strategies for a New Age*, Bantum Books, New York.
- Johns, S. 2003, Partners in the leadership dance: School vocational learning partnerships and community development, *The Educational Forum*, 67, 4, pp. 317–325.
- Johns, S., Kilpatrick, S., Mulford, W. & Falk, I. 2001, Thinking outside the box: A remote VET-in-schools program challenges traditional boundaries. Paper presented at the AVETRA Annual

- Conference Adelaide, 28–30 March 2001. Retrieved 26 May 2003, from
www.avetra.org.au/2001%20conference%20pages/PAPERS%202001/Johns%20Kilpatrick%20Mulford%20Falk.pdf
- Kilpatrick, S., Falk, I., Johns, S. & Smith, T. 2002, Lifecycles and leadership: partnerships for VET. Paper presented to the fifth Australian VET Research Conference, *Making a World of Difference*, The Heath Function Centre, Caulfield Racecourse, 21-22 March 2002.
<http://www.avetra.org.au/2002%20conference%20pages/2002papers&abstracts.htm>
- Kilpatrick, S., Johns, S. & Mulford, B. 2003, Maturing school–community partnerships: developing learning communities in rural Australia, *Educational Research, Risks and Dilemmas*, New Zealand Australian Association for Education Research Conference, Auckland, 29 November–3rd December. <http://www.aare.edu.au/indexpap.htm>
- Kilpatrick, S., Johns, S., Mulford, B., Falk, I. & Prescott, L. 2002, *More than an education: Leadership for rural school-community partnerships*. Canberra: Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.
- Lambert, L. 1998, How to build leadership capacity, *Educational Leadership*, 55, 7, pp. 17–19.
- Lane, B. & Dorfman, D. 1997, Strengthening community networks: The basis for sustainable community renewal. Retrieved 10 January 2000, from
<http://www.nwrel.org/ruraled/Strengthening.html#d>
- Langone, C. A. & Rohs, R. 1995, Community leadership development: Process and practice, *Journal of the Community Development Society*, 26, 2, pp. 252–67.
- Leithwood, K. 1994, Leadership for school restructuring, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 30, 4, pp. 498–518.
- Leithwood, K. & Duke, D. 1999, A century’s quest to understand school leadership. In J. Murphy & K. Klouis (eds), *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration* AERA, Washington DC.
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. 1985, *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications, California.
- Peirce, N. & Johnson, C. 1997, *Boundary Crossers: Community leadership for a global age*. The Academy of Leadership Press, Maryland, USA.
- Rost, J. 1991, *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century*, Praeger, New York.
- Rost, J. 1993, Leadership development in the new millenia, *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 1, 1, pp. 91–110.
- Senge, P et al. 1999, *The Dance of Change*, Currency, Doubleday, New York.
- Sergiovanni, T.J. 1994, *Building community in schools*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- Silins, H. & Mulford, B. 2002, Leadership and school results. In K. Leithwood & P. Hallinger (Eds.) *International handbook of educational leadership and administration* pp. 561–612, Kluwer, Norwell MA.
- Sorensen, T. & Epps, R. 1996, Leadership and local development: Dimensions of leadership in four central Queensland towns, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 12, 2, pp. 113–25.