

2015

Imagining and shaping: exploring creativity in leadership

Julie Maree Wilson Reynolds
University of Wollongong

Recommended Citation

Wilson Reynolds, Julie Maree, Imagining and shaping: exploring creativity in leadership, Doctor of Philosophy (Integrated) thesis, School of Education - Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wollongong, 2015. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/theses/4405>

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Imagining and Shaping: exploring Creativity in Leadership

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy (Integrated)

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Julie Maree Wilson Reynolds BA, Dip Ed, MA, MEd

**School of Education
Faculty of Social Sciences**

2015

CERTIFICATION

I, Julie Maree Wilson Reynolds, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Integrated), in the School of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Julie Maree Wilson Reynolds
9 February 2015

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the participants who so generously gave their time to share their leadership and creativity with me. Their wisdom, professionalism and candour were inspirational. Their insights have not only contributed to this study but have enriched my own leadership practice.

I am grateful for the guidance of my supervisors, Narrotam Bhindi and Ian Brown, and appreciate their willingness to read numerous drafts and discuss my ideas as they unfolded. I have valued Narrotam's encouragement to me over many years and thank him for helping me to take on this challenge. I am also very grateful for Ian's perceptive insights, encouraging guidance and wonderful good humour.

I am indebted to my family for their support and encouragement. My mother Doris Wilson and my sister Carol were at my first graduation and I look forward to inviting them to the next one. My children John and Stephanie have endured many conversations about creativity and leadership. I know that they will have lives marked by both qualities. And finally to my dear husband David. Thank you for believing in me and for encouraging me to step up to new challenges. Your love and support underpins this project.

This thesis is dedicated to my father John Donald Wilson.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to better understand the role of creativity in educational leadership. As school leaders are charged with the task of shaping learning communities it is important to understand the ways in which they approach this complex challenge. Toward that end, the researcher probed a number of questions: What elements of creativity are evident in the role of the principal? Do these elements impact on leadership decisions? How do social, political and technological changes impact school leadership? Do school leaders see themselves as creative? Are some principals more attuned to the creative aspects of their roles? What are the implications for future training and research? In approaching these questions the ways in which change, leadership and creativity are intertwined was explored.

Using a phenomenological approach, seven principals in Australian independent schools were interviewed. Informed by research in the field, a theoretical model was designed to explore four elements of creativity: person, process, product and place. The participants shared their leadership experiences, highlighting particular creative traits they displayed in their leadership roles, the ways in which they approached challenges, the unique elements of their school communities and the contexts in which their leadership and creativity was exhibited.

The interviews brought to life the complexities inherent in the process of supporting, developing and sometimes redefining the culture of a school. The

experiences of the participants exposed the need for flexibility in leadership. Rather than always adopting a preferred style, the principals demonstrated the need for different leadership styles in response to varied challenges. The ideas of creative tension or paradox were a common thread in the narratives of the leaders. The importance of communication, often persuasive in approach, was also highlighted. In regards to creativity the principals demonstrated a number of common traits. Some of these included: strength of purpose, commitment, optimism, resilience and an ability to reflect. Risk taking, problem solving and an ability to oversee a complex web of systems, programs and relationships were also evident. Linked with these skills was an astute understanding of place and time and an ability to creatively balance compliance, tradition and innovation.

The findings of the research demonstrate dynamic links between change, leadership and creativity.

Creativity in Leadership – Unravelling the Rope

Change, leadership, and creativity intertwine like the strands of a rope.

(Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011, p.3)

My experience in educational leadership roles has prompted me to reflect on the complexities of leadership in Australian schools. A context of social, technological and political changes has intensified these complexities. While these complexities have increased, research and interest into leadership styles and theories has also increased, and it was here that my research interest began. I reviewed a number of leadership theories each having their own proponents in the research world, including: transformational, instructional and distributive leadership models. All these theories contain relevant insights for the school leader but in my reflection on their usefulness I became increasingly sceptical of the theoretical “silver bullet” that would encapsulate all that is required in the role.

This enquiry led me to further reflect on what I consider to be the central challenge of educational leadership, that is, the responsibility to imagine and shape an educational community. It is this imagining and shaping that has the greatest fascination for me. As an English teacher I have spent years considering the significance of writers and thinkers on our society and the ways in which they tell stories which make meaning, challenge ideas and change the worlds in which they inhabit. Fay Wheldon (1993) in her literary critique coins the term “cities of invention”, to symbolise the creative worlds which writers create for their readers

to metaphorically inhabit. These cities are the worlds which the writer and the reader share as they wrestle with values, ideas and understandings. It seems to me that school principals are also creators of “cities of invention”. Their daily work seeks to build organic communities that will disseminate ideas, establish values and promote understanding. They too seek to create “avenues of learning” and “edifices of insight”, which will not only educate students but will enrich the communities that they serve. As Van der Mescht says: “Organisations spring from the will and imagination of people” (2004, p.5). It is this creative element of educational leadership that is the most fascinating component of the role and one which receives limited attention in the research.

As I reflected further on the notion of creativity the ideas of Ken Robinson and Howard Gardner challenged my thinking. Robinson (2011) questions the current educational structures and argues that we have too long held onto an industrial model of education. Ranking students by age, using standardised testing and sitting students in rows are all part of a conveyor belt approach from a bygone era. This model, he argues, is poorly serving our children and is crippling creativity. Coming from a long and distinguished career in educational research, Howard Gardner (1993, 2008) also calls for change in our educational systems. He urges educationalists to reconsider the purpose of education and to move away from “facts and standardized testing” to promote ways of thinking that will create in our young people what he calls “Five Minds for the Future”: the disciplinary mind, the synthesizing mind, the creating mind, the respectful mind and the ethical mind (Gardner, 2008). If leading thinkers are calling for a more creative approach to

education it is important to consider how the current leaders in Australian education are approaching their roles.

My own experience tells me that a principal of a school has a very important role to play in setting the agenda for change and improvement. As a leader I have been very aware of the responsibility I have had to imagine and shape the educational contexts in which I have worked. Oftentimes that has meant drawing together resources, staff, students and parents in strategic ways to bring about change. I have seen that the principal is very much the creator of a community and the decisions he or she makes ultimately shape the culture. The leadership skills required for this shaping are complex, demanding both careful strategy and flexible creativity to be successful. It is this sense of creativity in leadership that I wanted to explore.

As part of the research degree I embarked upon coursework. From this experience a number of things became very clear. Firstly I have little affinity for the reductive process of quantitative research but rather a deep interest in qualitative research. The complexities inherent in research that is focused upon the authentic views of people fascinated me and the study was designed with this in mind. I initially focused upon the effectiveness of specific leadership theories but soon became sceptical of a prescriptive approach. My own leadership experience had shown me that being a principal demanded creativity and flexibility which would not easily be represented in a single leadership theory.

In preparing for the interviews I considered the significance of context and spent time reviewing the role of the interviewer. To better understand the process of interviewing I spoke with social researcher Hugh MacKay. From this I gleaned the importance of being neutral, almost a non-entity, to allow the participant to ruminate and answer questions that have not been asked. I wanted the interviews to allow each participant to have time and space to express attitudes rather than answers. At the same time the humility inherent in the phenomenological approach caught my attention and I could see that it would provide the perfect framework for interviews that privileged the speaker rather than the researcher.

Finally, in my preparation for the research, I had been using the term “creative leadership” but felt that it sat uneasily with my determination to avoid a prescriptive approach. A suggestion to consider the importance of “creativity to leadership” seemed to imply a distance between the two notions, which did not well represent the synergy I was trying to identify. Finally I decided to employ the phrase “creativity in leadership” which suggests an active interplay between the two ideas. This phrase became the framework for the research journey.

Reflecting upon creativity in leadership brought many questions to mind. *What elements of creativity are evident in the role of the principal? Do these elements impact on leadership decisions? How do social, political and technological changes impact their leadership? Do principals see themselves as creative? Are some principals more attuned to the creative aspects of their roles? Is creativity a natural trait or something to be learned?* As I considered the ways in which I would approach these questions it became clear to me that the answers were not

only to be found in theoretical research but in the very experience of the principals themselves. Spending time speaking with principals and uncovering their perceptions of their experience and whether there were aspects of the role, which could be essentially creative, seemed the most appropriate approach. This is where the study began and a model for exploring creativity in leadership was developed. Within a phenomenological framework the interviews with principals sought to further explore the creative aspects of educational leadership.

My aim was to better understand the connections between change, leadership and creativity. The quotation at the beginning of this section articulates the ways in which the three components intertwine “like the strands of a rope” (Puccio et al., 2011, p.3). The metaphor not only suggests that each strand is important in the make up of the rope but also that having the three strands makes for a stronger rope. As the challenges and opportunities of change present themselves to our educational leaders, a capacity to maximise creativity in their leadership may enable more visionary and effective outcomes. This study aims to explore the connections, the tensions and the possibilities of this three-stranded rope.

Chapter 1 Change – the first strand

With most other observers, I am convinced that education stands at a crossroad. The shifts in the world are so cataclysmic, their implications at such variance with past practices that the status quo cannot endure in most parts of the world.

(Gardner, 2000, p. 59)

Understanding the context of change

The current school leader is working in a time where change is an important contextual feature and learning communities in Australia are situated in a social landscape that is incredibly dynamic. The last few decades have seen unprecedented changes in how we all live, work and learn. To fully understand how these changes impact upon educational leadership it is first necessary to attempt to sketch some of the most important social, political and educational shifts. Although the focus of this thesis is creativity in leadership, the ambiguities and challenges of the current social landscape provide an important contextual backdrop for the study.

How do our educational leaders view the context of change in which we find ourselves? In their book aptly titled: “Dancing on a Shifting Carpet” Degenhardt and Duignan (2010) effectively outline the rapidly moving base upon which our education system is resting. They also contend that in a world of rapid

technological and social change there is an urgent need for new paradigms of schooling. Fullan (Fullan, 2001a, 2008; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2010) takes this a step further and argues that a context of change might not only require innovation but can paradoxically help to facilitate creative breakthroughs. As he states: “Remember that a culture of change consists of great rapidity and nonlinearity on the one hand and equally great potential for creative breakthroughs on the other. The paradox is that transformation would not be possible without accompanying messiness” (Fullan, 2001a, p. 31). It is this “messiness” in our modern world, which will not only require our leaders to develop creativity in leadership, but which might also, paradoxically, inspire it.

The Knowledge Society

One of the most noteworthy changes in our modern world is the shift to a “knowledge society” and the external and internal pressures, which this shift has brought (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010). What does the concept of the knowledge society mean and how is it relevant to this research? Simply stated it is a new order of society where information and innovation provide the competitive backbone to a consumer market. It is a move away from capital or labour as the main resource of society to one in which knowledge, supported by powerful new technologies, is the centre of productivity (Hargreaves, 2003). This society is driven by innovation and learning. In defining a knowledge society Hargreaves says its focus is to: “process information and knowledge in ways that maximize learning, stimulate ingenuity and invention and develop the capacity to initiate and cope with change”

(Hargreaves, 2003, p. xviii). This new way of working and thinking by its very nature demands interplay between change and creativity.

This knowledge society, and its dynamic interface, has created a range of challenges for learning communities. Degenhardt and Duignan (2010, p. 12) note that the knowledge society places external pressures on schools to address social problems caused by rapid change, and to adequately prepare students to live and work in a quickly changing world. In addition to this, they note internal pressures, which also arise as students, and parents deal with unprecedented social pressures. The unprecedented access to international news as it occurs is just one example of a new pressure of the knowledge society. International events and disasters are broadcast in real time around the globe often with no considered contextual information. International wars, disasters and threats are at the fingertips of our young people brought to life by their computers and phones. Robinson is critical of what he calls the “news industry” which he says is “ferociously hungry” to generate or indeed manufacture news stories around the world and around the clock for their own “bottom line”. Add to this a rapidly expanding culture of social media and a full suite of human suffering and calamity can permeate the lives of our children without warning. Robinson warns: “All of this adds to the general sense of crisis that permeates 21st century culture” (2011, p.45). Educational leaders are aware that in this context of crisis many in society now look to schools as “centres of stability, and communities of safety” (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010, p.14).

Although our knowledge society invites a welcome focus on learning and innovation, many educational leaders decry the ways in which our educational frameworks are more akin to a nineteenth century industrial era model (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010; K. Robinson, 2011; Thomson, Lingard, & Wrigley, 2012). Robinson (2011, p. 57) refers to set hours of operation, prescribed rules of conduct, the principles of standardisation and conformity and the manufacturing principle of linearity where children are put into classes according to “their date of manufacture” rather than their learning needs. Thomson et al. (2012, p. 2) note that many school buildings still have raised platforms for teachers, and an organisational system that promotes the myth that knowledge comes from teachers in discrete units called subjects and that knowledge in schools is to be transferred from the one who knows to the one who doesn’t. They note the fact, that in their information rich world, young people have multiple sources of knowledge, which are often ignored by the official schooling process (Thomson et al., 2012). In the context of this out-dated paradigm, Robinson (2011, p. 61) argues that educational leaders divide the curricula into two broad groups: “the useful disciplines and the useless ones”. He bemoans the lack of focus on the arts and laments the waste of creative talent that ensues. Ironically the knowledge era not only requires creativity and innovation but also a responsive flexibility that will prepare young people for a world in which tomorrow’s jobs are not yet invented.

Globalisation

Another important contextual change impacting our learning environments is globalisation. Simply stated globalisation is the gradual interconnecting of different countries and cultures often involving trade, technology and ideas. Linked to globalisation is the resurgence of neoliberalism, which has seen the rise of free trade, the growth of economic liberalisation and reductions in government spending. The move towards economic rationalism has impacted social policy and the education context in a range of ways. It is not the intention of this study to consider all of the complex and wide reaching impacts of these political or social phenomena, but it is clear that the social pressures and market forces of our globalised world have impacted our school systems. For example, in a study reviewing the rise of violence in our schools Debarbieux argues that globalisation and the resulting social, political and economic inequality, which it has brought, have aggravated the tensions in schools in working-class areas (Debarbieux, 2003). Similarly the creation of a global marketplace and the impact of cheaper overseas labour have cut the number of entry-level jobs for youth. The increased competitiveness in employment has made a Year 12 credential or a tertiary qualification more necessary in securing employment (Bagnall, 2011). This has led to higher numbers of students in post compulsory schooling and tertiary education. An increasing dependence of Australia's economy on the global market has also seen an increased political pressure on educational policy and governance. Bagnall (2011) argues that this political pressure has promoted greater interest in economic indicators rather than quality indicators. He notes that staff to student ratios, student progression rates and annual attrition rates have been at the centre

of many decision making processes, rather than a focus on measures of human capital and quality of education (Bagnall, 2011, p. 369-370).

Another change in the current educational landscape is an increase in national and international testing. The last twenty years has seen an increase in international organisations that offer testing and measurement of school data which is then used to steer change (Thomson et al., 2012). The promoting of greater efficiencies and the increased focus on internationally comparative scores can be seen as an offshoot of globalisation. This increase in data driven competition has been criticised. For example Thomson, Lingard and Wrigley (2012, p.6) argue that testing regimes lead to pedagogical impoverishment, a pursuit of short term attainment targets at the expense of long term achievement and a widening of the gap between the highest and the lowest achieving students. The significance of national and international testing has seen a steady increase in the Australian educational landscape over the last two decades. Comparative data from overseas has been quoted in educational debate and calls for greater standardisation across the country has gained momentum in the wake of this debate. Australian Education Ministers review international data to measure the success or failure of their policies against other countries (Bagnall, 2011, p. 370). The introduction of the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) in 2008 was the first move towards standardising educational testing in Australia based upon models in the UK and USA (Dulfer, Polesel, & Rice, 2013). The introduction of the “My School Website” in 2010 invited a direct comparison between schools on the results of the national testing regime. By using the test as a key indicator in the Schooling Resource Standard (SRS) to determine the Commonwealth’s

calculation of recurrent funding for schools it has become “high stakes testing” (Dulfer et al., 2013). Because of this, critics argue that National Assessment Program’s simplistic and narrow focus is incorrectly used to measure what should be a much broader understanding of school environments. The submission by the Whitlam Institute to The Senate Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Dulfer et al., 2013) states:

We would argue that NAPLAN has become the default measure for very significant policy purposes and as such is bearing a weight much greater than would or should be expected of what is said to be a simple tool for diagnostic purposes. The most obvious manifestation of this is that NAPLAN has been formally incorporated as the key measure with National Education and Reform Agreement (2013). (Dulfer et al., 2013, p.6)

The implementation of the new National Curriculum in Australia in 2014 continues to reinforce this move to a great sense of accountability and standardisation in the Australian educational landscape. This is also viewed by some as the diminishing nature of the State in the dialogue process between government and electorate which is another by product of globalisation (Bagnall, 2011, p.369). It is thus clear that the impacts of globalisation have brought new changes and challenges to those who are responsible for shaping our educational communities.

The global teenager

How do globalisation and the opportunities and demands of a knowledge society impact our educational communities? Whilst this study does not intend to offer a detailed analysis of this question it is clear that the implications for our school students and our educational leaders are profound and far-reaching. Bagnall (2011) notes that the “global teenager” has an international interconnectedness that is irreversibly shaping our society. The internet has connected young people in a new virtual world which promotes culture and ideas with an unprecedented speed and reach. Nicholas Carr (2011) is one commentator who has warned about the developmental implications of the internet in his book “The Shallows”. He contends that the increased dependency upon technology has serious implications for society generally and within individuals specifically. The title suggests the book’s main premise, that the internet and its associated technologies, by the very nature of their breadth and reach, invite the user to skim across shallows of information, rather than to dive deeply into reasoned thought. He warns that technology is not merely a tool that can be used, but is rather a force that will inevitably mould the user’s ways of thinking (Carr, 2011, p. 47). Quoting research from Stanford University in 2009 he argues that:

Given our brain’s plasticity, we know that our online habits continue to reverberate in the workings of our synapses when we’re not online. We can assume that the neural circuits devoted to scanning, skimming, and multitasking are expanding and strengthening, while those used for reading and thinking deeply,

with sustained concentration, are weakening or eroding. (Carr, 2011)

These findings are relevant to our educational leaders and will certainly impact the ways in which our learning communities work and the manner in which our students embrace learning. The ways in which our educational leaders embrace or reject a force of such challenging and unprecedented change in our modern world will require great wisdom and creativity.

This chapter has only briefly touched upon a few of the most important changes and pressures facing our current generation. There are many other pressures, which could be cited, as relevant to our young people. Population pressures, generation gaps, unemployment, social exclusion, isolation, growing rates of mental illness and social disconnections are just a few. There is also evidence that open borders and markets have led to an increasing divide between the economic advantaged and disadvantaged around the world (Hargreaves, 2003). Hargreaves argues that where market forces have driven political agendas at the expense of good policy then fragmentation, nationalism and in extreme cases ‘jihad’ arises (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 31). The political insecurity in our post “9-11” world is just one contextual feature of our current education system. Although there has been a natural move towards strengthening security and walling in our safe zones, Hargreaves calls for a rethinking of our knowledge society. A focus in our political and educational systems that is cosmopolitan rather than conquering, inclusive rather than exclusive and based more heavily on moral responsibility than on market forces. In the same way Gardner calls for a far broader understanding of

educational endeavour, one which involves “motivation, emotions and social and moral practices and values” (Gardner, 2000). He says:

I envision a world citizenry that is highly literate, disciplined, capable of thinking critically and creatively, knowledgeable about a range of cultures, able to participate actively in discussions about new discoveries and choices, willing to take risks for what it believes in. (Gardner, 2000, p. 25)

The context of change is an important consideration for our educational leaders. Understanding that the elements of leadership and creativity are played out in a rapidly changing environment has provided an introductory context for this study. It seems clear that our best leaders will be attuned to the changing needs of our learning communities and will embrace innovation, adaption and action. This introduction can best be concluded with this call to action by Ken Robinson:

In the 21st century humanity faces some of its most daunting challenges. Our best resource is to cultivate our singular abilities of imagination, creativity and innovation. Our greatest peril would be to face the future without investing fully in those abilities. (K. Robinson, 2011, p.47)

Chapter 2 Leadership – the second strand

It is possible that in the past, creativity was an optional feature of leadership. In today's world, with its staggering rate of change, it is no longer optional.

(Sternberg, 2007, p.39)

What is leadership?

Harris says: “Leadership is primarily about influence and change” (Harris, 2009, p.10). If we understand that a school leader’s main role is to bring influence and change then we can see why school leadership is such a complex topic to review. Leadership research is itself marked by a diversity of approaches and philosophies and the very complex nature of the educational context compounds this further. In their review of empirical literature on the role of the principal and school effectiveness Hallinger and Heck note the challenge for researchers in this field: “The complexity of extraorganizational and intraorganizational processes represents a particular challenge for researchers who study causal relationships involving leadership and school effectiveness” (Hallinger & Heck, 1996b, p.7).

They argue that qualitative approaches to the study of leadership in schools are essential to encompass not only the complex set of interactions that are involved but also the underlying, and equally complex, set of processes that need consideration.

In his review entitled “The Leadership Challenge” Mulford (2008) identifies the three key components which school principals need to influence. They are the context, the organisation and the leadership of the school and the ways in which they interrelate. He argues that successful school leaders need to be “contextually literate, organisationally savvy and leadership smart” (Mulford, 2008, p67). Similarly Fullan (2001b) has also identified reasons for the complexity inherent in schools, embracing the two aspects of influence and change. He argues that current school leaders need to address significant changes as they are being called upon to oversee what is a complex reculturing process. The influencing and moulding of a culture within this particular context is a complex task. Secondly, he identifies that there are many tensions that underpin school leadership including: internal vs. external demands, autocracy vs. democracy and competing demands between both the personal and the professional. These tensions add to the complexity of the role. The third challenge Fullan identifies is the need for school leaders to vary their approaches in different situations or phases of any change process. School leaders have a web of stakeholders including students, staff, parents, community and government and a leadership approach which can both support and serve all of these stakeholders is necessarily complex. He states:

We are not only dealing with a moving and changing target; we are also playing this out in social settings. Solutions must come through the development of shared meaning. The interface between individual and collective meaning and action in everyday situations is where change stands or falls. (Fullan, 2001b, p. 9)

He also notes that school leaders are given very little direction in their leadership roles and most commonly receive only guidelines for action rather than steps to be followed (Fullan, 2001b; Fullan et al., 2010). The realities of complexity, influence and change are important factors in any consideration of educational leadership.

Amidst this complexity the sustainability of leadership is another consideration worthy of mention. Ulrich and Smallwood note that improvements in leadership are often “dashed against the realities and headwinds of making change last” (2013, p. 32). They define leadership sustainability as the ability to turn leadership training and coaching events into patterns of behaviour: “Leadership sustainability is a lasting and durable commitment to personal change. It may start with learning agility, but it has to show up in leadership actions” (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2013, p. 33). Fullan takes this further and argues that solid leadership at all levels in education is the only way in which large scale sustainable reform can be achieved (Fullan, 2002).

In considering leadership it is also important to understand its correlation with educational outcomes for students. In their review of the evidence, including measures of student learning from districts and state-collected data and variables such as student attendance and retention rates, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004, p. 5) found that in American schools leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school related factors that contribute to what students learn, concluding that the demonstrated effects of successful leadership are greater in schools with more difficult circumstances. Furthermore research

suggests that leadership is more important to creating the context for success rather than student success directly. In his overview of the impact of leadership and his analysis of the research base, Muijs argues that leadership variables are only “modestly to weakly related to outcomes” (Muijs, 2010, p.46); however citing a number of studies Muijs demonstrates the significance of leadership to the creation of such factors as the mission, values, cohesion and morale – all of which have positive impact on educational outcomes (D'Agostino, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Muijs, 2010). A similar finding was articulated by Dinham (2004) as part of the AESOP (An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project) study. The study noted that certain attributes and practices of principals were a key factor in producing the environment where exceptional outcomes could occur (Dinham, 2004, p.354). Therefore when considering leadership in this study it will be important to consider both the style of leadership and the context in which it occurs.

Despite this systems approach much of the research context for leadership has revolved around the articulation and evaluation of varying models of leadership. Heck and Hallinger note the scholarly trend in the diversity of frameworks and methods (2005, p.232). Despite a plethora of approaches much of the debate has been dominated by two theoretical approaches: transformational leadership and instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003). A discussion of these two leadership models and how they might relate to the notion of creativity will provide a useful theoretical framework for this enquiry. Three other relevant approaches to leadership and creativity will also be discussed: distributive leadership, a systems

model of leadership and contextual leadership, all contributing to and strengthening the framework.

Transformational Leadership

The theory of transformational leadership first emerged in the late 1970's with the argument by Burns that effective leadership occurs when people engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and efficacy (Burns, 1978). His theory suggested that leaders could transform the life of followers by altering their perceptions, aspirations, expectations and values. This approach was further developed by Bass and Avolio (1994). Bass provides an early definition of the theory:

Superior leadership performance – transformational leadership – occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and mission of the group, and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group. Transformational leaders achieve these results in one or more ways: They may be charismatic to their followers and thus inspire them; they may meet the emotional needs of each employee; and/or they may intellectually stimulate employees.

(Bass, 1991, p. 21)

The theory has been further refined by Leithwood (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005) and others.

One of the difficulties inherent in the theory has been the ability to quantify it. Measuring tools such as the "Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire" (MLQ) by Bass (Bass & Avolio, 1994) and the "Leadership Participation Inventory" by Kouzes and Posner (2008) are attempts to measure the less visible aspects of leadership noted in the transformational theory. Despite a wide use of these measuring tools some researchers argue that they are rather weak and more focused on prescription (Muijs, 2010, p. 56). In keeping with this notion Bess and Goldman criticise the theory's evocative terminology, the highlight on individuals, the attention placed on successful rather than unsuccessful leaders, lack of quantitative assessment and a lack of detail about how to enhance charisma (Bess & Goldman, 2001, p.431). Gronn (1994, p.264) questions the desirability of charismatic leadership, arguing that the reliance on one person can be a dangerous foundation for an organisation and he also questions the feasibility of a skill that cannot be trained or put in place as required.

Despite these criticisms the interest in this charismatic or transformational paradigm continues. Storey argues that its popularity is aided by a sociological attraction to powerful people and the observation that the charismatic leadership theory is attractive from a strategic management perspective. Organisations, stakeholders and leaders themselves are drawn to the "reputation capital" that such a description might bring them and their organisation (Storey, 2004, p.22-23). In the context of the late 20th century and early 21st century where great interest is placed on the increased performance of companies, leaders and schools then the transformational paradigm can be seen to be a valuable commodity.

These divergent views are of interest to this study as transformational leadership has been linked with creativity. In a review of the transformational leadership theory Puccio, Mance and Murdock (2011) argue that its focus on change and transformation has a direct link to creativity. In their analysis they isolate four main features of the leadership theory: idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, which they argue can provide a framework that supports and promotes creativity. They state:

As a contemporary and popular view of leadership, we believe that transformational leadership theory has forged a clear bond to creativity. This review should make it apparent that this leadership theory incorporates creativity both as a leadership quality and as an important outcome of leadership efforts. (Puccio et al., 2011, p.15)

To support their claims, Puccio, Mance and Murdoch referenced a number of studies; a discussion of two (Amabile, 1998; Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2008) will be useful. In Amabile's (1998) intensive research project called the "Team Events Study" she studied more than two dozen teams in seven companies across three industries to review the importance of intrinsic motivation. By following teams through creative projects she analysed the successes and failures and was able to use daily confidential email reports to assess the level of creativity used in problem solving. The findings showed that the way in which managers formed teams, communicated with them and supported their work either stimulated or frustrated creativity (Amabile, 1998). This finding is further supported by a study of transformational leadership in over forty software development companies in

Turkey (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2008) which as a result of hierarchical linear modelling and questionnaires showed that transformational leadership positively influenced employee's creativity through psychological empowerment. The data also supported the hypothesis that transformational leadership associates with organisational innovation (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2008, p. 461). In their synthesis of research into the contextual conditions on employee creativity, Oldham and Baer (2012) identify intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and empowerment as key features in the research field and state: "the majority of research seems to support a positive link between transformational leadership and creativity" (Oldham & Baer, 2012, p. 404). This documented connection between transformational leadership and creativity will be relevant to this study. Considering the ways in which the educational leaders demonstrate aspects of transformational leadership will be of interest.

Instructional Leadership

Whilst transformational leadership is a relevant leadership theory to consider in this research, another important theory, which has also been prominent in the educational field, is instructional leadership. Instructional leadership places teaching and learning at the forefront of decision making, and sets a strategic focus on the instructional program and the learning climate (Leithwood et al., 2004, p.6). Emanating from the schools improvement movement and the literature evaluating school effectiveness it can be traced back to the nineteenth century inspection systems that existed in North America, England and Australia. Instructional

leadership continues to find advocates and tends to flourish in times of greater organisational scrutiny (Hallinger, 2005, p.1). Hallinger notes that the “increasing global emphasis on accountability seems to have reignited interest in instructional leadership” (2005). This appears to be playing out in the current Australian educational context where a greater focus on large-scale testing, national curriculum and a heightened political interest in educational agendas is apparent. This scrutiny of educational outcomes, prompted by the NAPLAN testing, the My School Website and the introduction of the National Curriculum, has reignited an interest in instructional leadership in the Australian educational context.

In the context of globalisation is not surprising that instructional leadership theory has also come to the forefront of educational discussion internationally. Hallinger and Heck (1996a) in their review of the research into the principal’s role and school effectiveness note that instructional leadership has been the most frequently studied model. Hallinger also identifies that, in keeping with a refocusing of attention on the improvement of teaching and learning, instructional leadership has been brought to the fore and there has been an increased global trend to training principals in this leadership approach (2003, p. 342).

Although definitions vary, instructional leadership has a common focus on the role of the principal to promote and supervise learning with emphasis on quality teaching and academic learning. Robinson et al. (V. Robinson, Lloyd, Hohepa, & Rowe, 2007) identify five dimensions of the construct:

1. Establishing goals and expectations,
2. Strategic resourcing,

3. Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum,
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development and
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Instructional leadership presupposes that the principal will directly supervise and evaluate teaching both by modelling and setting high expectations; although some have questioned whether this aspirational leadership is truly attainable and whether principals will necessarily have the skills, time and motivation to be excellent instructional leaders (Hallinger, 2003; Mulford, 2008). The aspirational nature of this may be supported when analyses of daily activities of the principal have consistently indicated that time dedicated to instructional leadership is limited (Duke, Grogan, Tucker, & Heinecke, 2003).

A focus on instructional leadership which is calibrated on test data may be impeding the consideration of creativity in the classroom (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010, p. 586-7). Hennessey and Amabile note that USA has a newfound emphasis on “high stakes testing” and that the accountability movement may have taken hold at the expense of more creative approaches. They state: “Without a doubt, this change in focus has made it far more difficult for U.S. researchers to secure funding for the study of creativity in the schools” (2010, p. 587). They observe that relatively few investigators and theorists are researching creativity in the classroom in the industrialised nations of the West, whilst there is a “virtual explosion of interest” in Asia (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010, p. 586). They note there is a more creative approach to teaching and learning throughout Asia, particularly in Singapore: “But now, many Asian educators, policy-makers, and

researchers are calling for a shift of emphasis away from testing and toward the promotion of more open-ended, creativity-boosting teaching techniques” (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010, p.587).

Historically the research landscape has polarised the benefits and merits of transformational vs. instructional leadership and research interrogates which approach leads to better outcomes. In his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement in school aged students Hattie (2009) argues that the type of principal leadership is an important moderator, identifying instructional leadership and transformational leadership as key styles. He defines the former as having a focus on the learning environment, a system of clear teaching objectives and high teacher expectations for teachers and students. The latter he says is more about inspiration, commitment and moral purpose with a collaborative approach to challenges and ambitious goals. He argues that the evidence from the meta-analyses indicates that instructional leadership has a greater effect on the learning outcomes than transformational leadership. Quoting five different studies he identifies student achievement and instructional strategies as the most effective focus areas for the principal as leader (Hattie, 2009).

Hattie also refers to data from assessment centres in the United States, which have the role of assessing thousands of school personnel for placement as principals. In evaluating desirable criteria for the principalship the strongest correlation with increased student outcomes was with organisational ability, leadership and written communication skills. Hattie (2009, p.84) says: “Transformational criteria such as sensitivity, range of interests, and personal motivation had almost no effect on job

performance.” A review of the research literature by Robinson between 1985-2006 also found instructional leadership had a greater impact on student outcomes than transformational leadership (Mulford, 2008; V. Robinson et al., 2007).

With interest in identifying which of the two theories is the most successful, a number of educational researchers are now calling for an end to the polarising approach (Hallinger, 2003; Mulford, 2008) noting that there are strengths and weaknesses in both approaches which would be useful for different contexts. Transformational leadership invites empowerment and shared responsibility whilst instructional leadership has greater emphasis on the leader’s coordination and control in the provision of learning programs (Hallinger, 2003). Despite these distinctions Hallinger argues that the similarities between the two theories are more important than the differences (2003). He notes the importance of creating a shared purpose, goal setting, intellectual stimulation and modelling values as integral to both. Mulford, in his review of what he terms “adjectival leadership” also argues that debate over which theory is best is counter productive and that a combination of elements from a range of theories, with flexibility in application, is what is required in the modern educational context (Mulford, 2008, p.39). It will be important in this study to consider the ways in which instructional leadership is relevant to creativity in leadership.

Taking into account this call for a more inclusive and flexible approach there are a number of other theories, with connections to creativity that will also be of relevance to this study. They are: distributive leadership, a systems model of leadership and contextual leadership.

Distributive leadership

Originating in the 1980's, the concept of distributed leadership theory recognises the importance of relationships, teams and shared expertise in organisations. It is the social distribution of leadership promoting inter-dependency rather than dependency and inviting leaders of various kinds and in various roles to share responsibility in an organisation (Harris, 2005). Timperley (2005) suggests its genesis may have been a response to the dashed hopes of heroic leadership and a recognition of the growing complexity of the principal role.

In her analysis of distributed leadership Harris says: "Leadership is not the preserve of the individual but is a fluid or emergent property rather than a fixed phenomenon" (2008, p. 173). She also notes that that this does not necessarily remove formal leadership structures, but rather recognises both vertical and lateral leadership. Proponents of distributed leadership cite benefits such as the enhancement of organisational change and development, greater organisational performance, the building of professional learning communities and better student outcomes. In addition to this Gronn (2008) argues that distributed leadership lays the groundwork for a more democratic context and increases the sources and voices of influence in an organisation. In so doing, this widens the span of employee and member participation.

Despite this enthusiasm the notion of distributive leadership also has its detractors. It is seen by some as merely an aspirational approach, seeking to be equitable and inclusive in regards to leadership but in reality rather misleading and idealised

(Gosling, Bolden, & Petrov, 2009). Harris warns that distributed leadership cannot be taken at face value and questions about who does the distribution, and who is in receipt of it, must be clarified (Harris, 2008). Problems noted by critics include incoherence, inefficiencies, instability, and conflicting leadership styles. The current structure of school leadership is seen by some as a barrier to distributed leadership (Harris, 2008, p. 183). What is clear from the debate is that reciprocal relationships and power relationships cannot be understood in isolation from the context in which leadership is exercised and that authentic reculturing (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008) is a creative challenge for leaders. In an article reviewing the future of distributed leadership Gronn (2008) notes that there is an inherent weakness in only championing either focused or distributed leadership. To hold one view at the expense of the other, he argues, will not do justice to the patterns of divergent leadership inherent and required in a school context.

Systems Model of Leadership

Robert Sternberg articulates another relevant leadership model. Sternberg's "Systems Model of Leadership WISC" (Sternberg, 2007) proposes that a synthesis of wisdom, intelligence and creativity (WISC) is the key to effective leadership. He states:

One needs creativity to generate ideas, academic (analytical) intelligence to evaluate whether the ideas are good, practical intelligence to implement the ideas and persuade others of their

worth, and wisdom to balance the interests of all stakeholders and to ensure that the actions of the leader seek a common good. (Sternberg, 2007, p. 34)

He argues that wisdom; creativity and intelligence are attributes, which are modifiable, rather than traits, which are nonmodifiable. These attributes can be used in leadership decisions, chosen for the environment and will be demonstrated in keeping with the expertise of the leader (Sternberg, 2007, p.34). In defence of the model he cites a range of research projects that show that divergent and creative thinking is positively correlated with leadership success (Sternberg, 2007, p.35). He says:

It [creativity] is the component whereby one generates the ideas that others will follow. A leader who lacks creativity may get along and get others to go along. But he or she may get others to go along with inferior or stale ideas. (Sternberg, 2007, p. 34)

Another important aspect of the systems model is Sternberg's contention that creative leadership can take different forms (2007). In this regard he argues that some leaders accept current ways of doing things, others reject status quo and others integrate a selection of current practices. Within these three options there are a range of sub options. Those leaders who accept the status quo might: replicate the past; keep but redefine the status quo or; incrementally take steps to develop it further. He argues that those who reject the status quo might: redirect the organisation in a new way; reconstructively redirect by using the past as a starting point for something new; or start again from scratch as reinitiators. The

third group of leaders do not completely accept or reject, but synthesise by taking the best ideas from different paradigms and putting them together. In this regard he argues that WISC is a contingency based theory in the sense that “the optimality of actions depends on the situation in which the leader finds him or herself” (Sternberg, 2007, p. 40). This range of approaches presupposes a creative insight on behalf of the leader to well understand the organisational context and in seeking to shape its future demonstrate a perceptive understanding of both the present needs and the strengths of the past.

Sternberg’s systems view sees leadership as a set of decision processes that require wisdom, intelligence and creativity. He contends that truly good leadership is rare because a synthesis of these attributes is not always possible. In regards to creativity he says: “A leader who lacks adequate creativity may maintain an organization or be a presence in a field but is unlikely to be able to propel either into the future” (Sternberg, 2007, p. 39).

The work of Margaret Wheatley is also significant in considering a systems approach to leadership. In a similar vein to Sternberg’s analysis of wisdom, intelligence and creativity, in an interview with Alexander Schieffer, Wheatley argues that integrity and clarity are essential in leadership and that within a systems approach effective relationships are key (Schieffer, 2003). Wheatley contests that rather than trying to control, effective leaders need to understand the complexity of the system and leverage networks to bring about change. She also notes that in our current social context, which is marked by fear, there has been a

return to hierarchy, command and control. She argues that in order to be more creative and more adaptive we need to let go of fear (Wheatley, 1992).

With its future focus, and the underlying assumption that creativity is key, this theoretical approach is relevant to the exploration of creativity in leadership.

Contextual Leadership

Contextual leadership is a theory that identifies the significance of the context or environment to the dynamics of the leadership role. Rather than beginning with the individual leader and the traits they may demonstrate in their leadership, the model seeks to focus on the dynamic interaction between environment and leader. This involves the ways in which the context shapes leadership impact and also the ways in which various leaders may impact the environment: “Organizational context can be a dependent variable of leadership action as well as a variable of influence on leadership” (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006, p. 560).

The last decade has seen a greater focus on the context rather than the leader (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Hunt and Dodge argue that organisational values and relationship webs are central to leadership studies: “Leadership studies are unlikely to be of any additive value until they take into account organizational variables” (Hunt & Dodge, 2000).

Osborn, Hunt and Jauch also call for a contextual theory of leadership arguing that leadership and its effectiveness, in large part, is dependent upon the context (Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002). They argue that leadership is socially constructed, embedded in context and that conventional understandings of leadership theory neglect contextual dimensions. They state: “Leadership is not something one does by itself. Its dimensions emerge from actions and interactions” (Osborn et al., 2002, p. 805). They articulate the significance of internal and external networks to effective leadership and change management.

In analysing the organisational context many theorists refer to the complexities inherent in the interactions of diverse people in organisations and draw upon the work of complexity theory to further develop their understanding (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Osborn et al., 2002). Marion (2012) states that “complexity describes large networks of people and ideas that are interacting and changing in a complex dance” (Marion, 2012, p. 458). This puts the emphasis on the processes and social mechanisms rather than leaving it exclusively to the skills and capacity of the leader. The type of leadership, which is linked to this paradigm, has been labelled as “complex leadership” (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001) or “enabling leadership” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). This style of leadership characteristically enables interaction, interdependency and diversity. Proponents argue that leaders do not actually create innovations but rather, create the environments or conditions necessary for the innovations to occur. This summary is useful for understanding:

Complex leaders drop seeds of innovation rather than mandating innovation plans; they create opportunities to interact rather than creating isolated and controlled work cubicles; they tend networks,

they catalyse more than they control. Complex leaders are tags, symbols, rather than brave ship captains guiding their vessels to port. Leaders are part of a dynamic rather than being the dynamic itself. Leaders are one element of an interactive network that is far bigger than they. Complex leaders can perceive those networks; they can help enable useful behaviors, including the expansion and complexification of the networks. They cannot, however, control those networks. (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, p. 414)

Although work in this field is still developing, calls to focus more attention on research into organisational context and leadership suggest this will be a growing field (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006).

Conclusions on leadership

What conclusions can we draw from this overview of leadership theories? The chapter began with the premise that leadership is all about influence and change. An overview of the research landscape has shown a move away from a predominantly heroic view of leadership, which Mulford argues has had a stranglehold on educational thinking (2008, p. 38), and which suggested that influence and change needed to be embodied by a transformational leader. In considering the philosophical tussle between transformational and instructional leadership there is now a call for a more inclusive approach (Hallinger, 2003;

Mulford, 2008). This approach calls for a greater awareness of context and a willingness to employ different strengths at different times. As Leithwood et al. (2004) state:

Different forms of leadership are described in the literature using adjectives such as “instructional,” “participative,” “democratic,” “transformational,” “moral,” “strategic” and the like. But these labels primarily capture different stylistic or methodological approaches to accomplishing the same two essential objectives critical to any organization’s effectiveness: helping the organization set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move in those directions. Leadership is both this simple and this complex. The lesson here is that we need to be sceptical about the “leadership by adjective” literature. Sometimes these adjectives have real meaning, but sometimes they mask the more important underlying themes common to successful leadership, regardless of the style being advocated. (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 6)

In regards to the focus of this study it will be important to consider the ways in which leadership and creativity intertwine in the contexts in which they are apparent. The insights gained from considering distributive leadership, Sternberg’s systems model WISC, and contextual leadership approaches are also relevant. Although the focus will not be to consider “leadership by adjective”, there are undoubtedly aspects of these leadership theories that will inform our understanding and research. The review of educational leadership research has

highlighted the significance of the leadership role, the dynamic interplay of relationships and the contextual complexities of the school environment.

Chapter 3 Creativity – the third strand

By engaging in creative activity, people weave together the transformation of the known and the new into social forms.

(Moran & John-Steiner, 2003, p.72)

What is Creativity?

To better explore creativity in leadership it is necessary to devote some thought to the definition of creativity and how it is brought to life in the experience of school leaders. In the context of accepting that individuals are active participants in the construction of reality, it will be necessary to recognise the different meanings ascribed to the notion of creativity. The study will allow the participants to express their own experience of their leadership roles and how the concept of ‘creativity’ may or may not be relevant.

Many researchers in the field of creativity have noted the difficulties inherent in defining the concept. This is compounded by the fact that creativity has been conceptualised by many different domains and disciplines (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010). Despite this difficulty most researchers agree on three main components: firstly creativity embodies that which is new or innovative. Secondly it is valuable or of high quality, and thirdly it is appropriate to the context in which

it is created. In short it is “new, good and relevant” (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007, p.55).

In approaching a definition for creativity it is important to note that the term “creative” can be used as a noun, a verb or an adjective. It can apply to the product at hand, for example we may say “the poem was creative” or it can apply to the person who produces the work, as we may say, “the author of the poem was creative”. It may also be extended to the process of creating, for example “the devising of the poem demonstrates creativity”. These three examples demonstrate the ways in which we have come to use the word. We might use it to refer to an artwork or product, or it may refer to a person and their own skills, or it may also embody a process or series of actions (Weisberg, 1993). These variations in the use of the word have been embraced and used as a guide in securing a working definition.

The earliest definitions of the word creativity focused more heavily on the person, rather than the process or the product. This can be traced back to Guildford’s address to the American Psychological Association in 1950, and his work on divergent thinking, where the focus fell onto the creative person and the traits that could be identified. As he said: “...creativity refers to the abilities that are most characteristic of creative people” (Guildford quoted in Amabile, 1983, p.19). This person-centered approach to creativity has guided much empirical research (Amabile, 1983).

In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the process of creativity, reflected in research that is aligned with the business world. The work of Puccio, Mance and Murdock (Puccio et al., 2011) is an example of this. Their understanding of creativity involves “a proactive approach toward the production of novel and useful ideas that address a predicament or opportunity” (2011, p. xvi). Ken Robinson (2011, p.2-3) proposes this definition: “creativity is the process of developing original ideas that have value”.

Other theorists argue for a focus on the product of creativity. Teresa Amabile, a leading researcher in the field, has led the way in measuring creative products. She argues that the definition of creativity should be more generally aligned with product rather than person or process. She sees methodological difficulties in a definition based upon either person or process. She argues that the traits required for the person are not universally agreed upon, and the process involved may be ambiguous but creativity will always lead to a product. “The definition that is most likely to be useful for empirical research is one grounded in an examination of products” (Amabile, 1983, p.31). Her preferred definition is as follows: “A product or response will be judged as creative to the extent that (a) it is both a novel and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task at hand, and (b) the task is heuristic rather than algorithmic” (Amabile, 1983, p.33). It is interesting to note that the concluding section of the definition suggests a need to recognise process, despite the stated focus upon product.

To encompass the breadth of the term creativity, there is another element relevant to this discussion. In his research work Csikszentmihalyi (1988) has stressed the

importance of the social domain in an analysis of the creative. Rather than seeing creativity as the act of an individual, he argues for a systems approach, which will recognise the role society plays in accepting an innovation as valuable and worthy. He argues that creativity cannot be defined independently of the domain and time in which it is recognised. He states: “Creativity is not an attribute of individuals but of social systems making judgments about individuals.” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.198). This viewpoint recognises the crucial significance of the social environment or “place” in which creativity is valued and adds the fourth element.

In reviewing the literature, and considering the arguments above, it is evident that the definition of creativity should include all four elements discussed above. The person and the traits that they bring to creativity are essential. The process, and the ways in which the person uses their traits are also important. Following these elements there will be a product that emerges that can be observed. And finally the place (or environment) with which the creative person and the process engage will have significance. This study will consider these four elements: person, process, product and place as essential to a balanced view of creativity. Traditionally referred to as the “four P’s of creativity” (Kozbelt et al., 2010, p. 24) they are recognised by researchers in the field to encompass the important aspects of the term creativity (Kozbelt et al., 2010; Rhodes, 1961; Runco, 2007). The definition will also include the “new, good and relevant” (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007) components which have been accepted by most researchers. For this see the work of: Hennessey & Amabile, (2010); Kaufman & Beghetto, (2007); Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, (2004); Sternberg, (2008); Unsworth, (2001) and Weisberg, (1993).

For the purposes of this study the following definition has been devised:

Creativity is a deliberate process of imagining and shaping. The creator (person) applies knowledge and skill (process) to bring diverse elements together to make a new construct (product) that is valuable and relevant to its environment (place).

This definition, created for the purposes of this study, takes into account the empirical and theoretical work of experts in the field since 1950, and embraces the four elements of creativity: person, process, product and place. It also provides a robust and comprehensive framework for the research, which is sympathetic to the contextual focus.

In establishing a clear definition of creativity it is important to consider the difference between creativity and innovation. Innovation involves doing something differently whether it be the introduction of new policies, systems, programs or services, and, like creativity, it can be seen as both a process and an outcome (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012). Whilst creativity is more often applied at the individual level, innovation is usually considered at the organisational level. Creativity, innovation and change have a causal connection: creativity can lead to innovation and innovation can lead to organisational change. It is also significant to note the different contexts in which creativity and innovation can flourish. In their study of empirical research in the field, Damanpour and Aravind (2012) note that creativity is promoted by freedom and support, whilst innovation requires a more systematic approach. They argue that because innovation is an intentional, planned and structured activity, then clear performance management systems and

controls are important. Although this thesis will focus on creativity rather than innovation it is helpful to consider the differences between the two and the ways in which they are evident in our current educational context.

Creativity and Leadership

This study will not consider creativity in isolation but rather in the context of leadership. A number of writers in the field express a clear connection between creativity and leadership (Puccio et al., 2011; Simonton, 1984; Sternberg, 2006). Sternberg articulates this with what he calls his “propulsion model of creative leadership”. He states:

A creative contribution represents an attempt to propel a field from wherever it is to wherever the creator believes the field should go. Thus, creativity is, by its nature, *propulsion*. It moves a field from some point to another. It also always represents a decision to exercise leadership. (Sternberg, 2006, p.95)

In his thesis he argues that creative thinkers are like good investors, they buy low and sell high (Sternberg, Kaufman, & Pretz, 2003). He also explains that sometimes this means that the creative ideas are not immediately embraced and may be ignored or maligned within the field. In this regard a sense of determination and commitment may be required from the leader to see the creative concept born.

The definition devised for this study reflects the intertwining of leadership and creativity in its opening sentence: “Creativity is a deliberate process of imagining and shaping”. Whatever the preferred style of leadership, as previously discussed, it is clear that a leader is responsible for directing and shaping the organisation. A futures focused leader will also bring to bear an ability to imagine the future and work towards sustainability and innovation.

A Framework

Four elements of creativity have been selected as a theoretical framework: person, process, product and place. Beginning with the work of Rhodes in the 1960’s, they have come to be accepted and widely used in the development of theories of creativity (Kozbelt et al., 2010; Rhodes, 1961; Runco, 2007).

These four elements will provide a framework to look for similarities and differences and to identify those features, which are most important to leaders in their construction of reality. The four dimensions are:

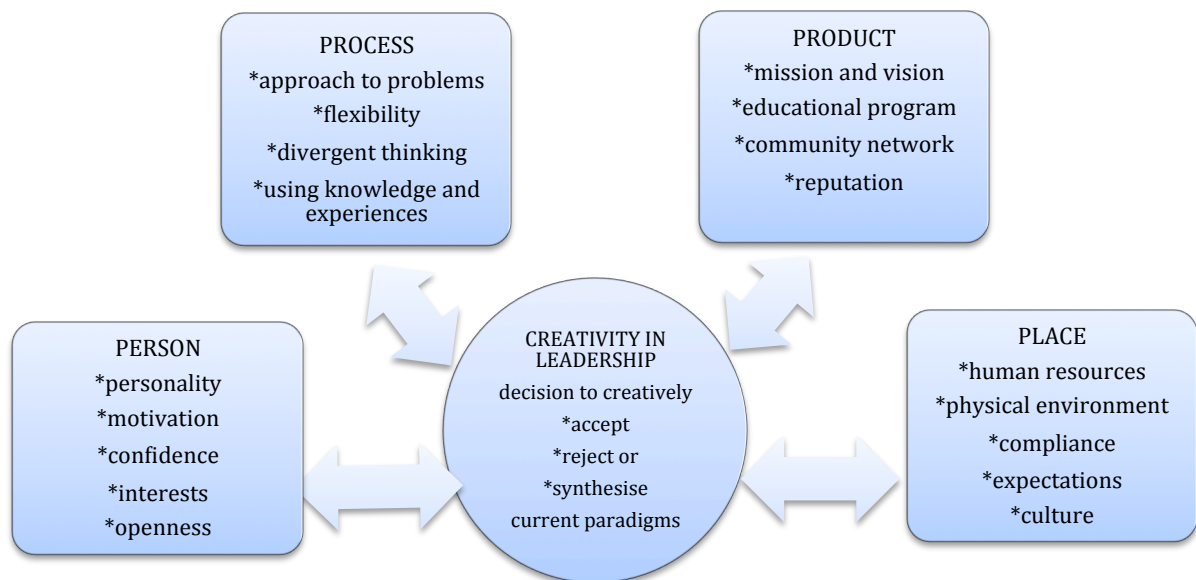
1. Person: the traits displayed by the leader that are aligned with creativity
2. Process: the ways in which the leader approaches problems and challenges
3. Product: the elements of the school community that are the focus of the leader
4. Place: the context in which the leadership is developed and in which the creativity is exhibited

The elements are interrelated, with each one impacting and informing the others.

The four elements will be used to structure the study.

In considering the manner in which these elements interact with one another and the ways in which they might inform creativity in leadership a visual representation of the concepts was devised. The model below encapsulates the conceptual framework of this study.

Creativity in Leadership – an emerging model



The above model has been designed by the author drawing upon the research work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Kozbelt (2010) and Sternberg, Kaufman and Pretz (2004).

The centre point of this model is labelled “Creativity in Leadership” and refers to the way in which the educational leader chooses to approach their task. Drawing on the work of Sternberg et al. and their Propulsion Model of Creativity (Sternberg

et al., 2004), each educational leader can choose to accept, reject or synthesise the current paradigms of their context. This choice, or series of choices, will determine their approach to their leadership role and will require a range of actions and decisions.

This research will have as its focus “creativity in leadership” but will use each of the four elements as a springboard to explore the ways in which creativity is expressed or demonstrated. Each of the four elements has a series of sub points, which will also inform the research. It is important to note that these lists are not exhaustive and that the study may uncover other dimensions. It is not the intention to predict the outcomes as the framework will be amended and further elaborated when needed.

A brief review of each of these areas and the ways in which they are relevant to creativity and leadership will support the chosen approach.

Person

There is a body of literature that considers the links between creativity and individual characteristics (Mumford, Connelly, & Gaddis, 2003; Prabhu, Sutton, & Sauser, 2008; Shalley et al., 2004; Sternberg, 2006; Sweetman, Luthans, Avey, & Luthans, 2011). Shalley et al. (2004, p. 936-937) identify ‘self confidence’, ‘tolerance for ambiguity’, ‘persistence’ and ‘openness to experience’ as personality traits that have been identified as having a correlation with creativity.

Sternberg (2006, p.89) adds the willingness to overcome obstacles, and the willingness to take sensible risks. He also notes that a preference for thinking and the propensity to think in new ways is also important, with the addition of an interest in global, rather than local thinking. He also sees experience in a role as important, arguing that to move a field forward one needs to understand it well. On the other hand he observes, there is a danger with complacency in the field and what could become a closed or entrenched perspective (Sternberg, 2006, p.89).

Harris (2009) identifies the challenges in identifying the traits of the creative person. She argues that creativity is difficult to define and sometimes evokes an emotional response, commenting it is marked by “a deep-rooted passion and urge to act and think differently, to try things out, to make mistakes and to see the potential and possibility of innovation at both the micro and the macro level” (Harris, 2009, p. 9). A recent study by Sweetman et al. (2011) explored the correlation between working adults’ specific positive psychological resources: efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience and found that they are related positively to creative performance. The link between psychological frameworks and motivation, perseverance and the willingness to take risks is an area worthy of exploration in this study.

Amabile’s work on the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is well recognised in the field. Taking her inspiration from Einstein, she proposes that: “An intrinsically motivated state is conducive to creativity, whereas an extrinsically motivated state is detrimental” (Amabile, 1979, p.221). In the development of her thesis she argues that intrinsically motivated people undertake

the activity primarily for the joy of engaging in it, whilst extrinsically motivated people may be more concerned with the reward they will achieve. Testing her ideas with groups with various expectations of external evaluation, she found that the group that was not evaluated performed better and were more intrinsically motivated, than the group that was expecting some form of evaluation. She notes in her conclusion that exceptional individuals largely internalise the norms and standards of their work and external evaluation is less necessary. And that highly creative people have a very high level of intrinsic interest in their work and will continue to be creative in the face of numerous extrinsic constraints (Amabile, 1979, p. 232). More recent research (Prabhu et al., 2008) has confirmed a link between intrinsic motivation and creativity. These studies are also relevant to other “personality traits”. Though they found no positive relationship between perseverance and creativity, they did find creativity was closely related to openness to experience and self-efficacy.

In an article reviewing how creative leaders think, Mumford, Connelly and Gadis (Mumford et al., 2003) identify leader cognition as a critical influence on the performance of groups engaged in creative ventures specifically identifying expertise and processing skills as central. In their study they conclude that it is more specifically the leader’s creative evaluation, which is the most important factor. They argue that evaluation is closely related to generative activities and idea production and that training in this area can bolster creativity. Their conclusion challenges the simple notion that openness to ideas is enough.

Csikszentmihalyi addresses the concept of the creative personality by focusing on complexity as the key. He suggests:

The reason I hesitate to write about the deep personality of creative individuals is that I am not sure that there is much to write about, since creativity is the property of a complex system, and none of its components alone can explain it...If I had to express in one word what makes their personalities different from others, it would be complexity. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 57-58)

He argues that rather than being an individual, the creative personality is more a “multitude” (1996, p. 57); in that the creative person contains a range of human possibilities and contradictory extremes. Referring to creative thinkers from a range of fields and contexts Csikszentmihalyi identifies ten contradictory tendencies, which he believes are present in the creative person: energetic and restful; wise and childish; playful and disciplined; imaginative and realist; extroverted and introverted; ambitious and selfless; strong and nurturing; rebellious and traditional; passionate and objective and able to suffer and enjoy. Although he admits his list is, to an extent, arbitrary he argues that to change a domain and thus be creative the person must be able to operate at both ends of such polarities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

This focus on the ways in which a creative person may present is an important consideration of this study. Although the intention of the thesis is not to quantify the creativity of participants or the ways in which leaders think, their

psychological resources, motivations, and predispositions to complexity will be relevant to both their leadership approaches and their disposition towards creativity.

Process

One important aspect of the “process” of creativity is the approach to problems. A number of theorists have suggested problem solving to be pivotal to the creative process (Amabile & Mueller, 2008; Hunter, Cassidy, & Ligon, 2012; Puccio et al., 2011). In support of this, Amabile (2008, p. 36) identifies four steps in the creative process: identifying a problem/opportunity; gathering information or resources; generating ideas and response validation and communication. Hunter et al. (2012) have articulated similar categories which include problem solving with the addition of a final step which involves the implementation of plans. Problem solving involves identifying and understanding barriers to success, Puccio and Mance describe a problem as “a gap between what you have and what you want” (Puccio et al., 2011, p. 43). Stoll and Temperley (2009) identify problem solving in the context of new ideas not fitting with current beliefs or ways of working. They state: “learning occurs as a result of dissonance” (Stoll & Temperley, 2009, p. 70), identifying dissonance as the catalyst for problem solving. Identification of the problem leads to generating ideas for solution and then prompts action to implement ideas. A fourth step identified by Amabile: “response validation and communication” could also involve evaluation (Hunter et al., 2012, p.531). How effectively a leader may approach each of these steps will vary, and the complexity of the school context may provide challenges to the process. In addition, some leaders may find the process more intuitive than others. For example, Rank, Pace and Frese (2004) note that charismatic leadership may not always support idea generation but may positively impact idea implementation (Rank et al., 2004).

When considering the process of creativity, divergent thinking is another relevant area for consideration. Divergent thinking is a theory describing the processes that lead to idea generation and the promotion of creativity and innovation (Acar & Runco, 2012) which was first introduced in the work of J.P. Guilford in the 1950's. The distinction between divergent thinking, allowing for original and varied ideas to be generated, and convergent thinking, which involves conventional ideas, and solutions, has been a driver for research and testing. Although divergent thinking was initially promoted as the main catalyst for creativity, over time there has developed a view that a balance of both divergent and convergent thinking will best promote creativity (Acar & Runco, 2012; Puccio et al., 2011). It can also be noted that problem generation tasks are commonly part of the testing for divergent thinking and the literature in creativity suggests that “problem finding” is at least as important as problem solving (Acar & Runco, 2012).

Stoll and Temperley (2009) spent time reviewing the processes of leaders in eleven schools to study how they approached the notion of creative leadership. Their research led them to identify the processes necessary for the promotion of creativity. They list them as follows: model creativity and risk-taking; stimulate a sense of urgency; expose colleagues to new thinking and experiences; self-consciously relinquish control; provide time and space and facilitate the practicalities; promote individual and collaborative creative thinking and design; set high expectations about the degree of creativity; use failure as a learning opportunity and keep referring back to core values.

The diverse ways in which the creative process can unfold is an important consideration to creativity in leadership.

Product

Historically the most objective approach to measuring creativity has been the consideration of product (Kozbelt et al., 2010, p. 24). Counting or measuring the number and quality of inventions, publications or works of art, for example, could be seen as a way to quantify the creative output. In regards to the educational context the assessment of “product” is rather more complex as there are so many components involved. The rise in interest in organisational creativity in the 1990’s (Puccio & Cabra, 2010) better encompasses the complexity of creativity in an educational environment. The systems approach provides a framework, which can take into account both the complex whole and the individual components (Puccio & Cabra, 2010).

Considering the important aspects of a school’s “product” the work of Dinham, Anderson, Caldwell and Weldon (2011) has also been useful. They argue for conceptualising leadership as “capital formation”. Drawing on the work of Sergiovanni they consider five leadership forces as pivotal to this capital formation. They are in hierarchical order: technical, human, education, symbolic and cultural (Dinham et al., 2011, p. 147). They argue that the first two may allow the school to avoid being ineffective but it is the last two that are essential for excellence. Using this framework we could identify the school’s teaching

programs, human resources, professional development, mission and vision and culture as the main elements of the “product”.

Place

The pressures inherent in an environment, which is being creatively shaped, will be an important focus of this study. The work of Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1990) has established the importance of context (or place) in the study of creativity.

I am convinced that it is not possible to even think about creativity, let alone measure it, without taking into account the parameters of the cultural symbol system (or domain) in which the creative activity takes place, and the social roles and norms (or field) that regulate the given creative activity.

(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.190)

Many researchers have come to recognise the significance of contextual characteristics in the study of creativity (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Shalley and Gilson (2004) note that research prior to 2002 predominately centered on the creativity of the leader and their behaviours rather than on the context in which this leadership is exercised. They argue that whilst much has been written on the direct link between leader behaviours and creativity, less has been written on what they regard to be the more important relationship between leadership, context and creativity (Shalley & Gilson, 2004, p. 34). Their

review of the social and contextual factors that can foster or hinder creativity involves consideration of three different levels: the job, the team and the organisation. The job level includes job characteristics, goals, resources, rewards, supervisory support, and external evaluation of work. Team factors include the social context and group composition. The organisational level factors are climate and resource practices. They argue that leaders have a key role in providing a context for the nourishment of creative practice.

Organisational factors have been noted to promote creativity in the work environment. Shalley and Gilson (2004) identify the promotion of risk taking, structures that promote ongoing contact with external others, and a supportive work environment as important. They also argue that creativity tends to flourish in less regimented environments (2004, p. 48). Hennessy and Amabile (2010) argue that constraints and pressures in the work environment are detrimental to creativity, whereas organisational supports, sufficient time, autonomy, developmental feedback and goal setting tend to facilitate creativity. Creating a climate of empowerment has also been noted by a number of researchers as a leadership essential (Jung, Wu, & Chow, 2008; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Expectations of leaders have also been seen to be important in the promotion of creative behaviour (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007).

Environment is not only relevant to creativity but to leadership development. Not only does the leader shape their environment but the work environment can also shape the leader (Porter & McLaughlin, 2006). Mumford, Hunter, Eubanks, Bedell and Murphy (2007) argue that when individuals enter an environment they

begin to develop the capacities and capabilities they need to adapt to the environment. This means that situations will shape their own sense of self and the identity they create, and ultimately the opportunities they can pursue (Mumford et al., 2007, p. 407). According to Mumford et al., the “selection, optimization and compensation (SOC) model” holds that: “Development proceeds as a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment, where development is driven by the situations individuals choose to, or [are] allowed to, enter” (Mumford et al., 2007, p. 407).

These considerations demonstrate the significance of place to leadership and creativity.

Conclusions on Creativity

This overview of the four P’s of creativity demonstrates the complexity of creativity and the range of ways in which it can be discussed and considered. The considerations above also show that the four elements are complementary and interrelated. These four elements provide a framework for the consideration of creativity in leadership. To cover each element the study will need to consider: the particular traits displayed in the leadership role that are aligned with creativity; the ways in which the leader approaches problems and challenges; the elements of the school community that are the focus of the principal and; the context in which the leadership is developed and in which the creativity is exhibited. A combination of

these separate elements may assist us to develop a coherent picture of creativity in leadership.

Chapter 4 Learning the ropes

*The lifeworld, the world of lived experience, is both the source
and the object of phenomenological research.*

(van Manen, 1990, p. 53)

In considering the importance and relevance of creativity in educational leadership I sought to use a research method that would actively involve the participants, be qualitative in approach and would seek to understand how individuals construct reality. It was important to me to interact with the participants in a way that would allow their own context and their understanding of their experiences to come to the forefront. Gall, Gall and Borg refer to the qualitative method as embodying “research traditions that focus on the inner experience of people” (2007, p. 492). I considered that a qualitative approach would allow me to focus upon the real life experiences of the participants and would afford rich data.

Social constructivism was chosen as the paradigm underpinning this research. This approach seeks to understand the world in which we live and work and to look for meaning through the subjective experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2007). The social constructivist understands that meaning can be varied and complex and must involve processes of interaction between people which also bring a range of meanings. In this framework: “The researcher is an author who writes from the midst of life experiences where meanings resonate and reverberate with reflective being” (van Manen, 1997, p. 368).

With meaning as a social construct the idea of context is central. This paradigm allows the research to seek meaning from the lived experience of people and then will provide a platform from which to make interpretations and draw conclusions or assumptions (Creswell, 2007).

A phenomenological approach

As a range of different qualitative methods was considered, the philosophical approach of phenomenology intrigued me. The definition of phenomenology as “the study of the world as it appears to individuals” (Gall et al., 2007, p.495) was relevant to my pursuit. The term phenomenology comes from the Greek, *phainomenon*, which means the appearance of things and the aim of phenomenology is “the description of phenomena and not the explanation” (Ehrich, 1999, p. 22). Denscombe summarises a phenomenological approach as an alternative to positivism as it emphasises the following: “subjectivity (rather than objectivity; description (more than analysis); interpretation (rather than measurement); agency (rather than structure)” (Denscombe, 2010, p.93).

As phenomenology has its origins in the disciplines of philosophy and psychology (Creswell, 2007, p.9) it is important to explain the antecedents of the approach before articulating the methods to be used. Its foundation lies in a philosophical reaction to scientific positivism and a move to an existential interpretive framework with the aim to better understand the human experience (Peterson,

1994). Whilst Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is regarded as the founder of existential philosophy, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is credited as the first proponent of phenomenology (Valle & Halling, 1989). His work sought to develop specific methods to study human consciousness and experience. The work of Heidegger, Sarte and Merleau-Ponty further refined the approach so that it became a psychological discipline that “seeks to explicate the essence, structure, or form of both human experience and human behavior as revealed through essentially descriptive techniques including disciplined reflection” (Valle & Halling, 1989, p.6).

The last century has seen many developments in both the philosophy and the methods suggested and there are a number of different approaches towards employing phenomenology in research (Van der Mescht, 2004, p. 2). Scholars have identified two main schools of thought: the “descriptive” (or psychological) and the “interpretive” (or hermeneutic) approach (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). The descriptive approach emphasises describing the universal essences. It seeks to present an “investigator free” description of the phenomenon by bracketing any bias and excluding previous knowledge from the process. The removal or bracketing of the researchers own reflections prevents emphasis on the interpretations of the researcher and give more emphasis to the description of the experiences by the participants. Its focus is very much on the individual rather than the context (Creswell, 2007, p.59). Moustakas (1994) is a key proponent of this viewpoint.

In contrast with the descriptive the interpretive approach places far greater emphasis on understanding the phenomenon in context. Rather than bracketing away the involvement of the researcher, the dialogue between the participant and their world is seen to be an essential part of the formulation of meaning. For this reason context is very important. The scholarship of van Manen (1990) represents this approach. In considering the strengths of the different styles, and because of the significance of dialogue and context, an interpretive or hermeneutic approach, informed by the work of Gadamer (1975), van Manen (1997) Van der Mescht (2004) and Groenwald (2004) was deemed more suitable for this study. This approach allowed the study to move beyond description and use the themes and patterns found in the data to become a platform for interpretation. As the researcher I sought to derive meaning from the phenomenon, the participants and the dialogue they have with their contexts (Van der Mescht, 2004). Wojnar and Swanson regard interpretive phenomenology as:

... most useful when the goal is to interpret contextualized human experiences. Such interpretations are a blend of meanings and understandings articulated by the researcher and the participants. Interpretive phenomenology is particularly useful for understanding how context influences, structures and sustains experiences. (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p.179)

Van Manen emphasises the importance of the study of the “lifeworld” or *Lebenswelt*, which encapsulates the realities of the world in which the participants live. The focus is on what the participants have experienced rather than what they know (Willis & Lopez, 2004). He also explains the poetic nature of the approach,

which involves “the voice in an original singing of the world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 13). This description suggests the originality, depth and richness of a phenomenological approach.

Another concept relevant to interpretive phenomenology is the notion of “situated freedom”. Valle and Halling (1989) define it as the dialogue between people and the world – noting that individuals act upon their world in purposeful ways but that the world also acts upon them (Valle & Halling, 1989, p.8). It is clear that individuals are presented with choices each day, which may be determined by their context in the world. Rather than having complete freedom to exercise choice in all matters, each person has what could be called “situated freedom”; that is, “the freedom (and obligation) of making choices within, and oftentimes limited by, a given situation that the world has presented to him or her” (Valle & Halling, 1989, p.8). This notion of situated freedom is pertinent to this study as the participants’ understanding of, and interest in, creativity may be impacted by the context in which they lead. This interplay between the personality of the leader and the environment in which they exercise their leadership is in keeping with the significance of context in the interpretive phenomenological approach.

My review of phenomenology suggested that employing an interpretive phenomenological approach would afford the opportunity to review the concept of creativity in leadership with the participants and to use their experiences to inform the study. A methodology that would recognise the breadth of creativity in a leaders’ experience in the educational context was important to me. Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) identify three advantages of phenomenological research. Firstly they

argue it is relevant to a wide range of educational phenomena. Secondly the interview process is wide ranging and is capable of identifying many important aspects of experience. Thirdly they contend that the procedures of phenomenological inquiry are quite straightforward (Gall et al., 2007, p. 497). The second of these advantages is undoubtedly the most important for this study. As creativity is such a broad topic, the wide-ranging nature of the interviews was considered to be pertinent. Identifying those features of creativity, which are of most importance to the participants themselves, would be useful in further qualitative or quantitative research on the topic.

Research Design

The interpretive phenomenological approach dictated the design of the research. To understand what is meant by phenomenology as a research method it is important to note some of the different epistemological principles at play in phenomenology as opposed to positive science. “Method” is not a specific sequence of technical procedures designed to protect the investigation from error, but rather general guidelines which are developed as the understanding of the phenomenon unfolds (Polkinghorne, 1989). Similarly “research” does not involve sophisticated instruments but open-ended interviews with general features and structures. Although the language and approach of the enquiry might vary compared with other research, the commitment to scientific values and truth are not compromised.

To uncover the “lived experience” of the principals, interviews were used to reveal how they understand the importance of creativity to their leadership role and school context and how they demonstrate creativity in their everyday experience. The interviews were subjective in style and the interviews focused on the participant’s experience and understanding rather than on any theory of creativity. Cobb-Stevens explains the significance of this approach: “Phenomenology is in fact interested in subjectivity precisely as the dimension wherein the world appears” (Cobb-Stevens, 2005, p.237).

The interviews were designed to allow the participants to speak about their own leadership experiences in relation to creativity and present their subjective views. It is clear that this subjective approach has the potential to challenge preconceived notions and assumptions by hearing the voices of those closest to the phenomenon and by gathering information from the primary source rather than from a secondary source. One caveat on this approach is the need to be transparent about its applicability and the limited use it has for generalisations with wider statistical effects. It is not quantitative in approach and the research conclusions do not claim the same empirical strength (Lester, 1999).

With the focus firmly on the lived experience of the participants, the design began with the phenomenon of creativity in leadership, involved investigation of the experience and possible participants, moved to the conducting and transcribing of interviews, the analysis of data and finally a presentation of the findings. This simple design is suggested by Gall and Borg (Gall et al., 2007) and has been developed into more detail in the table below:

Define phenomenon

- ensure the research questions have significance
- consider and record researcher's own experience with phenomenon

Investigate experience

- review professional and research literature
- review philosophical assumptions
- keep focus on lived experience not just concepts or theory
- construct criteria to locate participants and ensure ethics

Reflect on essential themes

- develop protocols to guide the interview process
- conduct and record interviews
- transcribe data and submit for member checking
- read/reread data for analysis and keep focus on research questions

Organise and analyse data

- analyse interview protocols for significant statements
- identify meaning units and themes of meaning
- write situational descriptions
- make additions, amendments or reinterview as appropriate

Present data

- further refine structural descriptions based on data collected
- write structural analysis - with own reflections incorporated
- present interpretations and conclusions
- present reflections for future research and practice

Adapted from (Gall et al., 2007)

The Participants

To research the phenomenon of creativity in leadership I interviewed seven current educational leaders. I felt that this number provided a sufficient range of responses whilst ensuring the data was manageable. Creswell suggests somewhere between five to twenty-five participants for a phenomenological study (2007, p.61) as the optimum. A mix of gender provided me with a diversity of viewpoints and responses. I chose to target school principals from independent schools for a number of reasons. Having had experience in this educational sector gave me some insight into the context. I was also aware that a greater sense of autonomy exists in this educational sector and a correlation between autonomy and creativity has been evident in research (Amabile, 1998; d'Inverno & Luck, 2012). Although the size of the school communities varied from approximately 600 to 2,000 students they were all Kindergarten to Year 12 schools, thus reducing a contextual variable. The schools were generally faith based or aligned with a Christian church body. For some schools this connection was missional in approach but for others it was more an historical tradition.

To select participants I contacted a number of independent experts for recommendations. These experts represent the key professional organisations connected to independent schools in Australia – the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), the Association of Independent Schools (AIS), Christian Schools Australia (CSA) and the Catholic Schools sector. In approaching the experts I explained the focus of the study and asked them to consider practitioners who they felt may have an interest in, or be displaying,

creativity in leadership. The reasons for their recommendations were varied and included: the participant's reputation for success in leadership, their involvement in innovative practice, their interest in educational research or their willingness to reflect on their leadership journey. On the experts' recommendations I made contact with potential participants either by telephone or email.

In keeping with the ethics approval, all participants were provided with information regarding the research (see Appendix 1-3). The voluntary nature of the research allowed me to speak with prospective participants to gauge their interest in being involved and answer any initial questions or concerns. I was encouraged by their willingness to be involved and found that out of all the enquiries I made, only one prospective participant declined involvement due to time constraints. I found that although educational leaders are time poor they value educational research and I found them to be very willing to take time to reflect upon their own leadership practices. This positive interaction with the principals supported the phenomenological approach, which seeks to establish an interpersonal engagement between the researcher and the participant (Polkinghorne, 1989).

The Interviews

The main method of data collection was the interview, an essential component of the phenomenological approach. Van Manen (1990) identifies two specific purposes for the interview in interpretive phenomenology: firstly to explore and

gather experiential narrative material that will help in the understanding of a human phenomenon; and secondly as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with a participant to explore the meaning of an experience (van Manen, 1990, p.66). In preparation for the interviews it was important to me to consider the ways in which the interview process would uncover the lived experience of the participants and how I could best structure my time with them to allow their voices to be heard. Creswell outlines a number of techniques for research interviews, which were useful to the preparation of the questions. These include: employ the words “what” or “how” to convey an open and emerging design; use exploratory verbs e.g. “describe the experience”; use open ended questions; and expect the questions to evolve and change with each interview (Creswell, 2009, p. 130-131). I spent time researching a range of interview techniques and interviewed the social researcher Hugh Mackay (2000) to ensure that the preparation for the interviews would assist in the delivery of effective data. Influenced by the work of the psychologist Carl Rogers, Mackay stressed the importance of suspending judgement and giving minimal feedback. His style of questioning is a story telling model where he invites participants to ruminate, allowing them to direct the discussion. The interviews were modelled on this approach and with minimal interference I invited the participants to “ruminate”. The preparation and research into the interviewing processes was rigorous. Appendix 4 details background research on developing questions for interviews.

As phenomenology requires a conversational process and is “interested in people’s experience of social reality through their own interpretations of it” (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008, p.64), it was necessary to briefly outline the

phenomenological approach so that participants were aware of the style of response invited. An excerpt from the introduction used before each interview is as follows:

As it is a phenomenological study my focus is very much on the personal experience of my participants. As we talk I invite you to share practical examples of your experience, how it looks, sounds and feels to you in real life. Your own observations about the experiences you have had will be really important to me. I am not looking to discuss theories of creativity but rather exploring your experience and understanding. ...As the interviewer I will try to say very little and let the focus be on your ideas and your reflections as they unfold.

The complete introduction can be read in Appendix 5.

In preparation for the interviews I prepared a standard interview form to direct the questions with the aim of covering the four dimensions - see Appendix 5. Using guide notes from Polkinghorne (1989, p. 48-49) the interviews were open ended and loosely structured. The interview questions sought to explore the importance of creativity in leadership in regards to person, process, product and place. I also sought to uncover the ways in which the principal might use their leadership skills to creatively accept, reject or synthesise the current paradigms in which they lead. This form was used more as guide rather than a prescriptive outline for the interviews. The interviews were digitally recorded and notes were taken to supplement these recordings. I also took time after each interview to

record my impressions of the interview, including physical cues and contextual information.

The interviews developed as conversations around themes and I encouraged the participants to focus on the practical rather than the theoretical. It is important to note that the scripted questions were only used as relevant and that in each interview I chose to respond to ideas and stories given by the participant. Drawing again on the work of van Manen (1990) I encouraged the participants to use anecdotes where appropriate to illustrate their discussions. Anecdotes can expose hidden meaning, show insight and in the narrating process can reflect knowledge, as van Manen says:

The paradoxical thing about anecdotal narrative is that it tells something *particular* while really addressing the *general* or the *universal*. And vice versa, at the hand of anecdote fundamental insights or truths are tested for their value in the contingent world of everyday experience. (van Manen, 1990, p. 120)

Reissman notes that: “By our interviewing and transcription practices, we play a major part in constituting the narrative data that we then analyse” (Riessman, 2008, p. 50). To encourage the participants to share their stories I ensured my interactions established a positive interpersonal engagement with each participant. The interviews were conducted at a time and place most convenient to the participants, which was in all cases in their own schools. This meant that they did not need to travel and it also added a contextual integrity to the process. I greeted them warmly, thanked them for their participation with a small gift and

ensured the timing of the interview best suited their schedule. Such courtesies can help smooth the data collection process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 74). The positive and reciprocal nature of the process was demonstrated by the fact that a number of the participants thanked me for allowing them to reflect upon their role and to share their stories. The interviews were planned to take between half and one hour and almost all went to the full hour. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using Audacity software. The transcription process removed identifying features and noted other audio cues such as emphasis, pauses and other verbal or non-verbal cues - see Appendix 6. The transcripts were sent to the participants for their review before the analysis process. Each participant approved the material with only a few suggesting amendments.

Analysing the Interviews

The aim of phenomenological analysis is to identify a range of features and relationships that will illustrate the essential structure of a phenomena (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.45). To do this the transcripts of the interviews were closely read, reviewed and annotated. With reference to the insights and designs of Hycner (1985), Polkinghorne (1989), Giorgi (2006) and Gall, Gall and Borg (2007) I adopted a process that was relevant to aims of the study and the phenomenon. Phenomenology by its very nature is not prescriptive in method and a flexibility and responsiveness in approach is generally recommended by its proponents (Hycner, 1985).

Having personally transcribed the interviews I was very familiar with the content of each interview, and in this process I spent many hours with each script looking for emerging patterns and themes. I crosschecked these themes against my own notes which were my reflections following each interview. These notes identified contextual cues, variations of tone and relevant non-verbal information and gave another dimension to the transcripts.

Using the creativity in leadership model designed for this study, I made notes for each interview using the four dimensions (person, process, product and place) and was able to map patterns and variations. This process helped me to refine the material and assisted in the analysis of creativity in leadership. This involved identifying important statements and recording them in table form. Reducing the interviews to such specific segments (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496) was a very useful step in identifying the key statements and themes relevant to creativity in leadership. Using the four P's to organise the statements assisted in sharpening the focus points. The standardised format of the summary sheet was also useful in noting patterns, variations or gaps. See Appendix 7 for a sample summary sheet from one interview.

These summaries were then reviewed, annotated and further reduced to create situational descriptions based upon each of the dimensions of the framework and identifying the main features of creativity in leadership. These situational descriptions are what Polkinghorne refers to as “verbal portraits” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 45) and seek to bring together the field notes and interviews to let the authentic voices of the participants be presented. These situational descriptions

were further refined with reference to the transcripts and notes to ensure that the main themes were clearly presented. The situational descriptions are presented in Chapter 5.

It was at this point that interpretation of the aspects of creativity in leadership began to take shape and a structural description was devised. This became a summary of the main themes, patterns and ideas that are essential to the phenomenon of creativity in leadership. It is those observations that “underlie the experience of a phenomenon and give meaning to it” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496). These structural descriptions became the basis for further reflections, research implications and conclusions. See Chapters 6 & 7.

Validity

At this point it would be timely to consider the importance of validity in this research. This phenomenological research depends upon the link between the interview scripts and the veracity of any interpretations presented at the conclusion of the thesis. As Polkinghorne states: “The validity of phenomenological research concerns the question, ‘Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifest in the examples collected?’ ” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.57).

Gall et al. (2007) and Creswell (2007) identify a number of strategies to strengthen validity in qualitative research which were relevant to this study. Firstly the need

to recognise contextual completeness was addressed within the opening chapters of the thesis, which consider the interplay of change and contextual pressures. The introduction of each interview summary was also clarified by significant contextual details. The collection of rich data was another consideration in the quality of research. The interview transcripts were carefully prepared with detailed notes both during and after the interviews. In addition to this I kept a journal, to note any contextual features that would contribute to the richness of the data. Creswell notes the importance of accurate transcripts on which to build the research. Member checking followed to ensure the participants all reviewed their own data for accuracy and completeness. Every participant was sent the full transcript of their interview and was asked to send back comment or changes. Their responding comments demonstrated their appreciation of the detail, which was captured and although one was changed in regards to punctuation (wanting to better reflect a written text, than a spoken text) no participants altered the content or meaning of their interview. Finally, Gall et al. refer to researcher reflection as critical to sound research design. The phenomenological approach embedded this validation method and each step of the analytical process involved significant reflection.

The linguistic focus of phenomenological research demands a precision and confidence in expressing the philosophical and interpretive conclusions drawn. Care was taken to continually read and reread the transcripts, the associated notes and the situational descriptions to ensure that the conclusions were in keeping with the ideas expressed by the participants. But the subjective nature of the research approach does not lend itself to measures of validity used in qualitative research.

As a researcher working within a social constructivist approach, the conclusions of this research aim to honestly and humbly present the reflections of the participants and any interpretations I have made from these reflections. Any claims of validity beyond this cannot be supported.

Ethics

Ethics approval was granted to conduct the research by the Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Wollongong, approval number HE11/491 - see Appendix 3. Written consent was obtained from each of the participants and assurance was provided about anonymity and confidentiality and security of the data. This procedure was necessary to ensure that all participants understood the requirements and that the ethical standards were meticulously observed - see Appendix 1, 2 and 3. Data was stored in secure locations and back ups were regularly undertaken. Each participant reviewed the interview transcript and approved the material. It should be noted that the summary statements were deemed to be part of the analysis and as such they were not part of the material reviewed by the participants. As the interviews were candid and free flowing each of the principals spoke about specific programs or features of their schools, which may have led the reader to identification. To ensure that the ethics approval was not compromised and that anonymity was preserved, any context specific details about the schools were removed. In the final analysis of the material all identifying data was removed and pseudonyms were used to protect anonymity. The voluntary nature of the participants' involvement assisted with the ethic process.

Chapter 5 Jumping ropes and tying knots

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.

Max Weber

Interviewing the participants

This Chapter contains the situational descriptions of the interviews I conducted with the seven participants. I am very aware that this is just a snapshot of their realities and that much more could be written about the complex worlds of each of these leaders. To distil each of the interviews into a brief summary I spent time reviewing the transcripts and identifying themes which were common. Using the theoretical framework as a guide, the four elements: person, process, product and place were identified and further analysed. I also selected key phrases or quotations that would bring to life something of the interview itself. I am aware that these summaries are my interpretation of the interview but where possible I have tried to let the principals speak for themselves and articulate their own ideas. Their words as directly quoted are written in italics.

The interviews were, without exception, fascinating and inspiring. After each interview I wrote detailed notes to try and capture the essence of the meeting. It might have been something about the room, the tone of voice, the energy of the participant or the mood of the discussion. I was struck by the generosity of each of

the principals in not only giving up their time but in sharing so candidly about their leadership challenges. All were open to reflect upon their leadership and were willing to share their thoughts. I am conscious that the demands of the role allow for very little time to reflect and it seemed to me that the interview was not only valuable for my research but was also useful for them as an opportunity to debrief and reconnect with their own leadership vision.

Interviews in qualitative research are active, subjectively shaped and inherently an interpretive activity (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011, p. 150). I am also aware that leaders of independent schools have a very strong mandate to present their worlds in the best possible light. They are the central public relations person for their schools and will obviously want to present the very best of their dynamic communities. Knowing that this is a contextual constraint on my research process I must also acknowledge that many of them spoke in detail about challenges, frustrations and difficulties, which demonstrated their honesty and willingness to be vulnerable. Although the specifics of some of these challenges cannot be detailed here they certainly verified the authenticity of the leaders and their honest engagement with the process.

The seven interviews were all different in style and tone and each one reflected the unique leadership approach of the participant. The offices ranged from warm and cosy, to grand and impressive. Some had inspirational words on display, large collections of books or school photographs that symbolised the context. For some the office was representative of the style of school, whilst for others it intentionally reflected the principal's own style. It would be interesting to describe the scenes in

some detail however the situational descriptions have been written to intentionally avoid any specific identifying details. Although this may make the descriptions in some senses less vivid, it will ensure that the focus is on the phenomenon of creativity in leadership rather than on the participants themselves.

Paul – Dreaming and Scheming

Paul is the principal of a large, successful boys independent day and boarding school. He has been in the role for over fifteen years and when speaking about what the role means to him he used the words “*privilege*” and “*joy*”. He said: “*I get energised by being a principal*”.

The school community has high expectations and there is an interesting balance between the opposing forces of past and future, conservatism and innovation, tradition and futures thinking. Paul noted that his previous school had been very different in style and was seen to be innovative, and that his first few years in a more conservative context was challenging. He was aware that he was brought in as a change agent and much of our discussion was marked by reflections on the physical, educational and cultural changes he has overseen. In approaching the challenge he said: “*I was captivated by the thought of what could be done here.*” He spoke with humour about the cultural context, the brief he was given by his council and the tensions it provided:

We want you to fix up the academics, the spiritual climate, the rather red-necked element, remove the bullying, and so on. We want you to raise the renaissance element of the school and fix up enrolments, and certainly the finances, and put us back on the front page of the newspapers; and by the way, don't change anything!

Although it was a complicated task he has delivered a reform agenda in a conservative environment by encouraging “*buy in*” from all the stakeholders. He

did this by personally connecting and communicating with the stakeholders. In the interview he spoke of ways in which he had engaged and challenged the school council to think outside the square. He noted the importance of his engagement with both metropolitan and rural parents. These parents feel very strongly about the school and have a sense of ownership which could be at once supportive and challenging to a new leader: *“It was their school. I was brought in to change it.”* He noted that as the changes he brought in began to bear fruit, and the school was *“humming along better”* the parents were *“prepared to grant me absolution and forgiveness”*. He described the process he undertook as having a forming, storming and norming trajectory. He initially formed the ideas and policies with community input, and then moved to *“significant storming”*, which he said led to some unpopularity. He said that they were now in the *“norming”* phase, where change and innovation have become the norm.

Another key feature of the change leadership process for Paul was to create a strong collegial base. He spoke about forming “tissue committees”. He said:

Often we use handkerchiefs and they get absolutely vile. The great advantage of a tissue is that you use it once and then you throw it away. People are quite rightly horrified of committees because they can be overused and become vile.

He described their tissue committees, which might meet weekly for a few weeks to brainstorm ideas together. These committees guide Paul’s leadership, as he said:

“I use a broad collegial base in my decision making”.

Professional learning was another theme that came out clearly in the interview. Paul is widely read, visits others schools regularly and has a broad understanding of educational issues, not only in Australia but also around the world. He promotes active learning with his staff and invites them to visit other schools, generate ideas and build an authentic “*learning community*”. Although the interview showed his intelligent engagement with other principals and schools Paul also articulated energy to establish his school’s unique leadership in a number of key areas. He said:

I was getting very tired of coming across “me too” schools, and often I would see schools advertising that they are a leading school. I would ask, “what are you leading in?” I would be characteristically met with silence or a response which really didn’t indicate leadership, genuine leadership.

His commitment to authentic leadership was clear throughout the interview. He outlined the focus areas of his work and demonstrated many ways in which he and his staff were providing strong and very public leadership in three targeted areas. In this regard his leadership is not limited to the school community but involves influence with national bodies, international experts, politicians, media and the broader public. He is a leader who is keen to learn from others but is even keener to set the standard and articulate leadership.

Paul demonstrated a confident approach to risk taking. He invites feedback from all stakeholders, and although he describes some of the feedback as, “*pretty raw*”, he has embraced the ideas and leveraged the engagement to bring about change. In

considering the personal qualities needed to embrace raw feedback he made this comment:

After a while though, with the length of headship, you can get rid of the driven young man behaviours and release yourself to think: “well, ok, I can test things. It might fail. And guess what, I still think I am going to survive as headmaster of this school.”

Time in the role, a sense of autonomy, a positive reputation and an active engagement with the school stakeholders has given Paul confidence to take risks.

In the interview Paul referred to creativity more than any other participant. At the conclusion of our time he gave me an article he had been writing on the topic. He is a prolific writer and has written many texts on educational subjects including leadership. One of the points that he was keen to express to me was the futures focus of creativity:

People who are creative are very often futures focused. You can say this is what we’ve always been, this is what we are and we’re going to extrapolate this into the future. That’s an historical approach. I tend not to like this approach. I like to try to envision the future, and try to work out where the future is going. Then I say “Well, if that’s where the future is going, what are the implications for me now both personally and as an educator?” That I guess is a futures approach. That’s where most lectures finish on this particular topic. They talk about either an historical or a futures

approach. I think there is one more addendum. I think really creative people create the future.

He then articulated a number of ways in which he was working with educationalists around the world to create the future in education. His focus then turned to what he referred to as “*the rise of accountability*” and an interest in reclaiming issues of character, values and life skills. He said: “*There are limits to strict empirical measurement in education. People are now looking to find their soul. We’ve lost our soul somewhere. We’ve lost our purpose; we’ve lost our mission*”.

He spoke in detail about programs and opportunities, which he was leading at his school, to reclaim these qualities. He spoke about a building that was being designed to be a “*place of wonder*”. He described a personal development course “smuggled” to the students in a creative way and a life skills course embedded in a trek. He foresees radical changes in education in the near future and a more holistic approach to learning. He is excited by the richness of the experiences he is designing, promoting and leading. He smiled as he said: “*We’re still dreaming and scheming.*”

Jean – Mobilising Tensions

Jean is a principal of a mid sized metropolitan school with three years experience in the role. She described her school as “*debt free with strong student numbers and good to excellent academic results*”. The key themes of her interview were: tension, change and community. Despite her short experience in the role she had already come to exercise a range of creative approaches to leadership and had some clear ideas about its significance to her role. Jean identified tension as the key to creativity for her. She said, “*The creative person is the person who can take a tension between two things and make something out of it*”. Using art as an example she argued that there is a skill in taking components and putting them together creatively to make something new.

Look at the artworks of Picasso where he breaks up a face to create an artwork, rather than constructing an artwork with a face in totality. It is looking at the tension of all the different parts and being able to make something new out of a tension.

She recognised that her leadership role requires her to take “*tensions*”, manipulate them and seek to realise the “*new or better*”. In the interview she discussed a number of specific tensions related to staff, students or parents and the ways in which she had sought to bring resolution. In the resolutions she had used both divergent thinking and flexibility. One example involved a staffing matter, where the provision of long service leave facilitated an opportunity for retraining and redeployment of a staff member who was facing challenges. In discussing this and

other examples she noted that the capacity she had to invest time and money in the situations had made them easier to resolve.

In speaking about change, Jean explained that she had been warmly welcomed as a new principal after the long and stable tenure of her predecessor:

The change wasn't driven by disaster or need. Everything could have gone on exactly as it was. But I was coming into a school where the council, the parents, the students and the staff were excited by the idea that they might have some change.

She believes that the inherently conservative school demonstrated an interest in change and she felt she was given a free hand. Despite this freedom she was careful to explain that a number of the innovations she brought had been presented as “*evolutionary*” rather than revolutionary to ensure buy-in from staff. In keeping with this approach she had taken time to restate the aims of the founders of the school and had connected her leadership very strongly with the historical vision of the community. This is another example of recognising and manipulating “*tension*” to advantage. She was very aware of the desire for change and yet was aware of the inherent conservatism of the organisation. She had astutely measured this tension, and had carefully innovated whilst simultaneously celebrating traditions that were not to be touched.

Jean reflected upon the fact that she was creative in her approach but expressed the belief that creativity was not a requirement of leadership. She cited examples of successful principals that she knew, whom she regarded as managers, rather than

creators, and also principals that she knew to be creative personalities, whom she regarded to be less than effective principals. She did not see her skill set as being predominately managerial but rather a leader who seeks to inspire and change others: *“I think a creative person is someone who can manipulate a situation so that it enables other people to be more than they would be otherwise”*.

Jean displayed a keen interest in the cultural context of the school community and an understanding of the interests and values that it holds dear. She spoke of ways in which the predominant ethnic culture of the school impacted upon the relational constructs and the way in which the school operates. The community networks reinforce the discipline of the school and they provide a relational framework to support the principal. Although not personally sharing the cultural heritage, she did note ways in which she had approached it to ensure she could connect with the community.

In regards to her own personality it was interesting to note that her own sense of self and her own professional and public persona were not always matching. She said that others thought she was emotionally challenged by tensions and that they consequently acted to “look after” her. However, she said that in reality, she is quite emotionally self-contained: *“They have got a lot of sympathy for me and assume that I am far more tortured by the process than I am.”* Her comments in the interview suggested that she is able to creatively present a public profile for parents, students and staff that can work for her in her leadership.

At the end of the interview Jean wanted to add her own reflection about the importance of setting a theme or establishing a symbolic image for the community to consider for the year. She gave a few examples and explained how she used them to inspire the students. She also uses the visual images to frame challenging conversations throughout the year and to creatively approach issues with students. She also suggested that the symbolic images helped the students to think more creatively about solutions when they were facing challenges. In reference to the use of symbolism she said: *“Creativity, if it is used properly, whether you are looking to resolve tensions or to build other people up, can produce the tensions that allow change to happen”*.

Peter - Intellectually Conceiving the School

Peter leads a large coeducational independent metropolitan school with an enrolment of over a thousand students from Prep to Year 12. It is a school that has faced challenges in terms of its location, its enrolment, its student population and its viability. Peter noted that the school was situated in a market place that was fiercely competitive. It is linked to one of the major Christian denominations and the school has both enjoyed and struggled with this association.

Peter has been in this role for three years and has been the principal of two other independent schools with more than twenty years experience. The interview had a philosophical and reflective tone. He asserted: *“I think what I enjoy especially is the intellectual challenge of conceiving of the school”*.

Peter views the process of creativity in his leadership as an enjoyable intellectual challenge. He spoke with energy and enthusiasm as he outlined the many ways in which he had stimulated the school community to rethink its identity. The main focus of this identity for him was the creation of an authentic faith based culture that would underpin the ethos of the school. He equated his role with that of a master teacher who would inspire the staff to adopt and promote the vision: *“One of my key roles is to teach teachers.”*

Another strategy that was being employed to build his creative vision was the promotion of Christian service as a way to commend the faith. His aim was to have faith *“permeate”* the school and be *“seamlessly”* included in all the teaching

programs. To ensure this vision is adopted Peter has developed a program of strategic communication. He makes it a priority to invest time with people; he regularly addresses staff and parents at meeting and events and he has developed a program of invitational speakers to visit the school. Despite this approach he was aware that many staff, parents and students might not readily choose to share the vision. One example he gave was to “*move around*” middle managers who might be tempted to block the vision, and then go directly to staff himself. He called this a “*cloak of populism*” and claimed that such critical communication was important to keep the momentum moving. He spoke with humour when he noted that the new model had excited the maths department, noting that it was widely understood that maths departments are not readily excited. His language in regards to inspiring staff had a Biblical overtone as he noted the joy that he felt when staff embraced the vision and “*the scales fell from their eyes*”.

A pressure, which Peter discussed, was the tension between vision and management. He noted:

I think it's a great role to be entrusted with the creative thinking of the school, the frustration is in not having enough time...because one's absorbed in so much management...so it's difficult to sometimes get to the creative aspects.

Early in the interview, when asked to speak about a problem that he had faced, he chose a difficult management issue to outline. The situation was complex and involved a wide range of people, both internal and external. He talked about the need to “*batten hatches*” in the process of this challenge. Confrontational

situations with staff and parents and the breadth of the role were also contextual pressures and barriers to creativity that he noted.

In the interview Peter spoke of approaching the challenges of the role with passion, confidence and purpose. He called it the “*foolish confidence of incumbency*”, and noted that his experience over many years had equipped him. He demonstrated that he was clearly driven by a “*deep belief*” in what he was doing, having a “*great passion for quality Christian education*” and has a “*sense that I have got something to offer and I am driven by it.*”

Two major challenges he identified were the need to conceptualise the school for the future and its sustainability in that future. He saw the primary focus of his leadership was to engage in deep thinking, which would lead the school to identify and meet challenges. He saw it as a risk that a school might just “*drift along as it has always done.*” Thus the focus on deep thinking was linked to school improvement and futures thinking: “*I’ve said to school council you pay me to think.*” He noted with humour that someone had once said to him “*The key role of the principal is to annoy people with ideas.*” and that he hoped that staff would say that he was “*very annoying*”.

There was a clear relational focus in the interview. When discussing his previous schools, where he had been longer in the role, he spoke fondly of the relationships with students and noted that these relationships gave him energy for the role. He spoke of the privilege of enrolling children in kindergarten and then graduating

them in Year 12: *“I feel that there has been a significant sharing of their life journey and hopefully a significant contribution to who and what they are”*.

This bigger purpose for the role came through in other ways in the interview. He explained that the creative imagining of the school was much more fun than *“looking for someone’s lunchbox lid”*. This use of humour to put things into perspective, and to build relationship, is clearly part of Peter’s approach to leadership.

Peter highlighted the scope and significance of the role of the principal, which he described as the *“great canvas on which we have to paint”*. The interview demonstrated his commitment to: inspiring others to learn and think, creating processes to improve outcomes, empowering others to find success, and impacting student lives for good. His commitment to a faith based education and the promotion of an authentic engagement with the Christian gospel was paramount. At the conclusion of the interview he spoke about his role as *“a work of a generation”*. When asked at the conclusion of the interview if there was any last comment he said: *“I think that principals need to be intellectually creative.”*

Sonia – Tailoring Leadership to Context

Sonia is an experienced principal, having led two schools for more than a decade each. This experience has given her a clear insight into the ways in which leadership needs to be tailored to the context. Her reflections revealed a strong relational focus yet also a clear sense of process. In the interview her face lit up when she spoke about caring for people:

What I feel most privileged to be part of is the opportunity to be of assistance to people when they are in need, and that's staff, students or families. We have a privilege to be a big part of people's lives.

Sonia spoke of her experience as principal in two very different schools. She described her current context as a “good school functioning well”. When she began her principalship she enjoyed strong support from executive staff, she said there were no “glaring” things that needed to be done and that the school was in a very strong financial position. When describing the changes that she had overseen she used the word “tweaking” to suggest a lack of urgency in the innovations. She said: “It's a happy place, I feel valued, I feel respected.” and she noted the joy she felt in crafting the resources to the needs.

In contrast to this experience she spoke very differently of her experience in a previous school that she described as “broken”. Declining enrolments, poor reputation, low morale amongst students and a staff resistant to change were the pressures she said were apparent in this context. Sonia observed the fact that in the

“broken” context her desire to be a collaborative leader was of no value and she had to *“take charge”*, make strong decisions and ignore a push for consensus. She used the word *“dictatorial”* as one descriptor. These two approaches to two very different contexts demonstrate both reflexivity and flexibility. In Sonia’s current role she feels able to creatively accept the status quo and build on the strengths of the community, whereas in her first school she felt she needed to lead in ways that would significantly change the culture. She noted: *“I was a very different principal in that school to the principal that I can be in this school”*.

She said that she had seen educational leadership move away from a model of control to a wider sharing of decision-making over the last few decades but that contextual pressures sometimes made this shift difficult:

Collaborative leadership happens if everyone is working in the same direction, but if you go in as principal of a school that needs significant change and people don’t want to change with you, then you cant be a collaborative leader, not in the initial stages. So in that school I had to sometimes just say “its happening and bad luck if you don’t agree with me”.

She spoke of how leaders at the time misunderstood transformational leadership and expected collaboration to mean consensus. She explained that she made some headway over the years but despite her efforts the ingrained culture did not change significantly.

Another aspect of the contextual pressures noted by Sonia was the difference in autonomy that the two school settings afforded. The first school was part of a system of schools that embraced an external distribution of resources. This, matched with the cultural difficulties, afforded the principal limited autonomy. In contrast Sonia's second school was independent in governance and she gave many examples of the freedom she had in meeting the community's operational and strategic needs. Sonia spoke of creative solutions she had brought about in staffing, special programs and building development. One example was the ability to buy an adjoining property, which was not a natural choice for a school site, and renovate it to become a hub for learning. She described her decision as being accepted by both the board and the staff with the phrase "*they just said 'fine'*". It was clear that her creativity was supported by the school's financial freedom and the confidence she had earned from her council and the staff.

Sonia's personality is clearly relational and her genuine warmth and care for others were evident throughout the interview. When asked what it was like to be a principal she joyfully exclaimed: "*I love it!*" Alternatively when asked how she felt when difficult performance processes for staff were unfolding she exclaimed: "*I hate it!*" just as passionately. Words like "*respect*", "*value*" and "*dignity*" peppered her interview and she proudly spoke of the community spirit evident in the school. It was clearly a focus of her work in the school to build an ethical and respectful environment. The interview demonstrated that she considered the faith-based heritage of the school as important in her own leadership. Relationships with staff, students and parents were afforded a great significance in the interview. She also described herself as an idealist and an optimist who was excited by ideas and

sometimes perplexed when others did not share her enthusiasm. She used the term “*hands on*” to describe her style and did admit to being very tired from the demands of the role.

Sonia articulated a range of problem solving strategies that marked her leadership style. When describing her approach to human resource challenges she outlined clear and well-considered processes. She also spoke of her intractability in one matter of employment conditions, well aware of the unpopularity of this approach. In contrast to this she outlined a creative solution to an employment issue that addressed a long-term health issue in a very generous manner. This involved employing an additional staff member to oversee a class whilst allowing the staff member who was unwell to continue in employment for as much or as little as her health allowed. This problem solving approach was in keeping with her commitment to people and enhancing their essential dignity. Problem solving with school families clearly involved her personal involvement from time to time, and it was apparent that there was a very generous investment of time and money in these processes. One example that she gave involved her leaving her desk, travelling to the hospital with a distraught parent and personally supporting the family in a complicated health issue for a student. This was a clear example of a flexible and creative approach that was based upon the core Christian philosophy of the school.

As a “product” the school community was clearly very successful and the environment was beautiful. The school had been recognised for its community spirit and Sonia described it as “*a happy place*”. In regards to her leadership role

Sonia noted the significance and weight of her decision making power. *“I am overawed at times by the real power of this role”*. She noted that as the leader of the community, she had *“the power to impact lives for good or bad”*. One specific example she gave in this regard was in the area of staff appointments, where her decision to employ, or not to employ someone would change their life. The *“seriousness”* of the leadership role was something she had come to understand in the latter years of her leadership. Another aspect of the “product” that was uncovered by the interview was the notion of the leadership role itself and its sustainability. The history of the school had demanded that she create a new model of leadership. In the interview she expressed concern that her active involvement in all areas of the community probably presented an unsustainable model and that succession planning would be a challenge.

Sonia admitted that knowing I was coming to speak with her about creativity had forced her to reflect on the concept. She said she would naturally have thought of *“flowers, art or performance”* if asked on the spot about creativity but the interview had prompted her to ask herself the question: *“Am I creative?”* This was her response: *“I think I am in my leadership, in the way that I solve problems, in the way that I am able to perceive people’s strengths and try to build on them and in the way that I am able to see multiple solutions for things”*.

The interview concluded with her observation that she was indeed a *“creator”* of community.

Matthew – Fighting the small fires

The difficult pressures of Matthew's school community provided the context for our discussion. As I entered his office he was part way through a renovation process, which he said, had only had a tiny budget and had not afforded the exact results wanted. His school had faced a difficult history and prior to his leadership the school had been financially insecure. He had been in the role for less than five years and in his first sentence he spoke of the rebuilding process as his most important priority. Although he noted a growing confidence in the school community, his leadership was being stretched by the divide between the "*ill considered*" decisions of the past and the hopeful vision he had for the future. The pressures of the financial situation surfaced in many of his descriptions and anecdotes, and these pressures were a dominant and recurring theme in the interview. In his opening words he used the word "*tension*" a number of times and it was a sense of tension and unresolved challenge which underpinned the conversation.

The difficult situation of the school led Matthew to speak of the ways in which he needed to be creative to bring about change. He spoke of the cost of "*off the shelf*" solutions to problems and explained that in his budget constrained context these type of solutions were not an option. Some of the "*solutions*" he saw as unattainable were consultancy, specialist professional development, planning advice or staffing additions, and whilst there was a note of frustration in his discussion of the prohibitive cost of these he conceded that the school's limited budget demanded a greater sense of creativity. He said:

I think there are lots of off the shelf solutions to every problem that don't really require any creativity, but when you cant afford any of the brands you have to go back to your work shed and make it yourself.

He gave a number of examples of areas in which he had creatively sought to solve problems including infrastructure, programs and resources. In each example he showed that carefully considered strategic decision-making on his behalf was the creative solution.

He expressed a frustration with the need to bring about “zero cost” solutions to problems and admitted that the need to keep fighting fires often hampered the potential for creativity. The complexity of the problems that the school had faced in his time as leader brought to life the challenges he was experiencing in the role. Some of these problems included emotional, legal, industrial and relational concerns and his stories about these challenges demonstrated limited access to professional or legal advice. Matthew said that in a few early crises he had been risk averse and overly cautious in his communication. He said he had been concerned that speaking about the issue might jeopardise the school, but he has since learnt that saying nothing can also cause damage. He said: “*You’ve got to actually suppress the fear of doing and saying the wrong thing and just trust your instincts.*” He saw his own inexperience and lack of training as constraining factors, which were compounded by the inability to engage consultants.

Changing the culture of the school was an area of great importance to Matthew. One example was communication with parents about the academic progress of their children. He described the demographic as having a relatively a weak engagement with education and a limited access to technology skills. He said:

We are moving towards online provision of information with regards to academic progress. It has been a process of teaching parents to value their child's education and teaching parents to deal with regular communications. Breaking the mold of the twice a year reporting process.

He admitted that the cultural shift had been difficult and connecting with the community had not seen success yet.

Concerns regarding staff effectiveness were also important in the interview. In a discussion about teamwork, the need for change and creative problem solving it was clear that Matthew was finding it difficult to entrust complex change issues to other key staff. Entrusting more to the senior executive, he argued, would better allow a leader to “*spend their time the way they wished*”. Rather than enjoying this freedom, Matthew expressed frustration with his need to focus on a number of key tasks, which he felt he could not delegate. The three areas, which he felt he could not relinquish, were: budgeting, timetabling and marketing. All three areas were linked to efficiencies, which were essential to keeping the school afloat. He also spoke of his frustration of the amount of time he needed to spend managing poorly performing staff. He said: “*A competent senior executive team frees the leader to spend their time they way they wish and therefore be as creative as they need to be in whichever area they need to be*”. He expressed a desire to be more

involved in the creative work of educational programming but said that in the very tight fiscal environment, he could not afford to let the other three areas slip.

Matthew was not the only participant who expressed the fact that he had never sought to be a principal. He said that the fact that he could not stand seeing things being done badly prompted him to step up to the role. He said: *“I love developing the backbone for change”* and described his interest in devising systems, which would turn ideas into reality, as a key driver for him. He spoke about a former career in industry where he saw a workplace that invited all staff to creatively review their own work and suggest ways to improve upon it. Reflecting upon whether this was a reality in his current situation he noted that teachers have infinite scope for creativity in their classrooms but he felt that compliance with agreed school policy was more important than creativity in organisational matters. An underlying tension between control and freedom, latitude and compliance was a feature of the interview and seemed to be a tension in the role for Matthew. He expressed an interest in delegating but had reservations about competency. He noted the importance of teamwork but was not always confident in the team. He saw a need to provide consistency but felt an urgency to deliver improvement. These tensions, or contradictions seemed to be heightened by the challenging environment of the school.

In the interview it was clear that Matthew was struggling with the instability of the community and finding it difficult to project the future vision within a context of uncertainty and challenge. He noted that creativity was necessary for solving the daily challenges but he felt his creativity was constrained in a deeper way for the

bigger picture imagining of the school. He said he would dearly love to be more involved in the devising of pedagogy and being a leader who was in the classrooms. He said he felt constrained by the performance criteria of school growth, student safety and efficiency and felt that he could not take his eyes off these areas. Although he enjoyed exercising creativity in the devising of the timetable, it was the imperative of staff costs and efficiencies, which kept this task in his brief. These brief excerpts reflect some of the main concerns:

I've got to try to imagine a way of making the school better on very little money and without a real understanding of where the school is going long term. Not being able to get a really big picture in place because you are constantly fighting the small fires.

In the perfect world I wouldn't have to give any consideration whatsoever to administration of the business arm of the school. Any consideration I gave to financial or business aspects would purely be creative. The creative elements in terms of the conceiving of a better place to be.

Joshua – Daring to Transform

Joshua is a principal of an academically and financially successful school with a strong reputation in its region. He was an experienced principal having served for over fifteen years in different schools, but had in recent years come to a new educational context. In our conversation he displayed a philosophical idealism, a yearning for cultural transformation and a commitment to building curiosity and risk taking. He has a vision for transformational leadership and was not interested in merely being a “custodian” of an already successful educational community. He said:

The role is designed around the structure and the system of a pre-existing school with a pre-existing strong sense of its own identity, and the head is a custodian of that identity, rather than necessarily a shaper of that identity. That’s been existentially very difficult for me, because I am innately concerned with influencing and shaping culture, so there’s a sense in which I’ve felt some tension.

What other school leaders may describe as strengths: features such as high enrolments, exceptional facilities, long waiting lists, a cultural commitment to learning and an enviable school reputation; Joshua saw as challenges.

He shared his reflections on the way in which these factors might hinder him in his mission to transform the school culture. His own vision for the school was to ignite curiosity and to embed a commitment to making a contribution to the wider

society. He described this as a “*good tension*” as it had allowed him to rethink his assumptions and work “*smarter*”.

Everything is relative to this culture and the mantra here is ‘if it ain’t broken don’t fix it, leave it alone’. That’s been the consistent thing said to me, which I’ve found, obviously, a bit frustrating, a bit limiting, so I’ve got to work around and within those constraints and that’s a challenge.

In outlining the pressure he faced in leading the school community, Joshua differentiated between an academic institution and an intellectual institution. The former, he argued, was driven by test scores and performance outcomes whilst the latter could be designed to “*ignite the mind to ask questions*”. He observed that test scores do not reward curiosity and spoke of the richness that could come with a broader understanding of learning. As a leader he was driven by a commitment to inspire curiosity and invite others to consider the contribution they could make to the world. He was acutely aware of the expectation that he must understand and respect the traditions of such a successful school, but at the same time he had identified a number of philosophical imperatives that were driving him to pursue a mission of transformation.

Joshua accepted that his questioning of the way things were done would be unsettling to many in the community. He noted the comfort that some felt in repeating a successful formula for education but lamented that “*the world isn’t like that any more*”. He argued that if they failed to embrace a changing world, and merely kept repeating patterns of education that were historically effective, they

would be “*under educating*” their children. He compared the “*transaction*” of getting test scores with the “*creation*” of a “*nimble and alive*” mind, which would embrace ideas, errors and decisions rather than regurgitate information. His use of the word “*despite*” was very telling in the interview, as he reinforced the fact that “*despite*” the school’s success he saw an imperative for change and innovation.

Joshua described his “*abiding yearning to make a difference*”. In identifying the source of this passion he reflected upon his own “*dreadful*” education and mused that an “*unsatisfied growing up process*” drives many principals. He described himself as a restless personality type who loved risk and struggled with waiting. Ironically, waiting was one of the strategies he had chosen to adopt in communicating with the community. Waiting to be invited to speak publically was a strategy that he embraced to avoid an insistent approach which he felt may alienate the community. In the meantime he had chosen to communicate more regularly through writing. He laughed at the incongruence of “*waiting*” as a dynamic leadership strategy but he used the metaphor of a chess game to underline the deliberate approach he had selected.

The virtue of listening was also a key theme of the interview. He described the community as not naturally attuned to listening, and not accustomed to gathering, hence the difficulty of speaking out his vision. In his own explanation of his personal approach he also mentioned the need to listen to others often. He explained that as a leader he needed to listen carefully to others and to understand what they are “*really saying*”. Later in the interview he gave an example that exemplified this philosophy, as he explained the need to embrace “*troublesome*

staff". He acknowledged that this could be difficult and risky but argued that in fostering dissent you could sharpen your practice. He noted that "*you do begin to believe your own rhetoric after a while*" and that relying on flatterers was not instructive. In all of this, he described himself as an "*immense idealist*" and someone who genuinely wanted to model his life on the example of Christ.

Flexibility of approach was evident in the leadership story of Joshua. In a previous school context he spoke about the way in which crisis had often driven change and that he had made decisions in the context of challenge and difficulty. In a very different paradigm he now felt he needed to "*ignite*" an acceptable level of discomfort, to promote change. These very different approaches to change management were both underpinned by an ability to embrace risk. Joshua outlined a number of risks which he had taken in his first principalship, such as changing the demographic of the school, taking on debt and expanding the school and promoting a positive vision in the face of vocal detractors. Joshua noted that the current risks were very different and were more aligned with a subversive approach to culture than a series of strategic changes. This subversive approach required him to counter the competitive, materialistic and individualistic spirit of the age with a different paradigm promoting service, generosity and unity.

Joshua demonstrated a commitment to a "*hands on*" approach to leadership and a personal connection with others to support learning. One example he gave was his support of the community service program which he described as "*breathhtaking and unbelievable*". He praised the work of two staff and a team of students who ran the program, worked sacrificially and promoted the innate dignity of children

with disabilities. Although he declined to take any credit for the success of the program he acknowledged that his personal interest in it, and his regular visits supported the vision in a practical way. In keeping with his philosophical approach Joshua reflected on the question of why philanthropy was important and what this program would do for the young people involved.

Another important process in leadership for Joshua was the power of story telling and the significance of language in cementing vision. He said: *“The role of the head is about giving voice, in a specific language, to a vision that describes who we are and what we are dreaming to be.”*

The interview was surprising because the “product” of the school could have been so easily presented as a great success story and one that required nothing more than a steady hand to preserve the status quo. Joshua demonstrated in the interview that sustaining a *“measured, orderly and comfortable”* context was not his vision and certainly not his passion. Instead he presented an authentic discontent with this product and a desire to create something new. The word *“transform”* peppered the interview. He said: *“Learning is about change. Learning hasn’t occurred if change hasn’t occurred. The transformational part of the work is what I am here for”*. It was clear from his comments that if at any stage that transformational process was unable to be part of his leadership he would walk away from it.

At the conclusion of the interview I asked Joshua what he thought of when considering the notion of creativity. He noted that it was *“the ability to see things differently from the way they are now”*. This definition is clearly a feature of his

leadership. In his role as principal, he desires change and he has chosen leadership processes that will create new communities. He reflected that creativity was “*part of the stamp of God in us*” and that imagination, hopefulness and bringing things to being were integral to the notion. He ended the interview with this comment: “*creativity is to see that which is not there now*”. This imperative drives Joshua’s leadership.

Michael – Just do it

All the participants in my research were incredibly busy and had many diary constraints, but my interview with Michael took seven months to organise. This small observation can reveal much about this educational leader. Michael is actively involved in educational reform and his diary is brimming with school, state, national and international commitments. The delay in the interview was not a lack of interest; rather it was proof that as a leader he is rarely still. I arrived at his school a little early and expected to wait in the foyer to the principal's office in the administration building, as is most commonly the way. Nothing to do with Michael is predictable – his leadership embodies change, movement and innovation, so finding his office was not a simple matter. Michael has relocated his desk to be in a space with other staff so he can embody the collaboration he articulates. As I approached the staff office area Michael was deep in discussion with a group of staff employed for holiday cleaning, discussing the latest building plans. His conversation with them moved into a conversation with me about the plans and it was clear that Michael would have preferred to walk around the campus showing me the vision rather than sit in a confined space for a formal interview. Although my desire to tape and transcribe the interview led to the latter approach, Michael wrote on the white board, accessed technology and regularly moved around the room, which showed something of his restless spirit and commitment to action rather than theory.

The school is a large and rapidly growing community with a constantly changing campus. Building and redesign are features of the school and learning spaces are

being creatively reimagined all the time. Many of the classrooms are not standard rooms with desks and chairs but are flexible spaces with lounges, cubes and creative workstations. Many of the rooms are open plan and resemble public spaces rather than traditional classrooms. There is a dynamic culture of change and innovation prevalent in the school and its doors are open to other schools and educational systems to visit. Staff members from the school regularly visit other schools around the country and around the world – either to present workshops or to review best practice. Many successful schools have a self-contained feel and want to present to the public a sense of completeness, but this community is physically and ideologically “on the go”. Although there is much pride in the advancements there is also a sense that there is still more to do. A call to action was a recurring theme in the interview and is evident in the physical and social framework of the school.

Michael’s leadership style is marked by vision, energy and passion. My first question asking him what it is like to be principal of this school was answered with the comment “*It’s a lot of fun*”. A clear sense of wonder and engagement with the process of change came through in all his comments. He spoke of the early days of his leadership and the many challenges that the school was facing. He described the vision statement he put together after a few weeks in the role and made mention that it was “*highly visual*”. He spoke of the support he received from the staff in the first year, and the autonomy that the board has given him to make the vision come to life. He made comment that he is now trying to hand the vision back to the Board to ensure that they also have complete ownership.

Michael described his style as very “*hands on*”, which in some cases could be misunderstood as a controlling approach. It was clear from the discussion that “*hands on*” to Michael does not mean being in control – rather it is bringing his own energy and activity to change and improvement. He said:

People would laugh because...they would say if we want to look for Michael in the morning we actually go to the garden shed or to the classroom to find him shifting the furniture around...why have an idea and then wait? If I've got the capacity to put something together for someone and to immediately resource them, then why not just do it?

We walked around the campus after the interview and although school was on a break many of the rooms were filled with staff and tradesmen working on changing the layout or the facilities. The sense of “*just do it*” is more than a slogan; it is a reality in Michael’s leadership and is evident across the entire school community. As he spoke about his commitment to action he quoted a school leader from another country who said their philosophy was “*Do then think*”. It was clear that this philosophy resonates with this active leader. He spoke of his direction to staff: “*Don’t think that you’ve got to get everything written in a paper before you come up with an idea, just go out and do it, and there might be paper afterwards about how successful you were*”.

Michael has a commitment to a culture of “*risk taking*”, albeit measured in budgetary terms, but certainly fostering risk and action rather than theory.

In terms of a leadership style Michael's focus is very strongly on empowering his staff. He spoke about bringing people on board with the vision, and articulated his desire to see others use their own ideas and creativity to make the shared vision come to life. This is a philosophical approach, which permeates his pedagogy: *"If you can't model as a leader the fact that you are moving from a context of controlling you to empowering you, then how are you going to do that with kids?"*

He spoke in high praise of the team around him who share the vision and add to it and actively make things happen:

Vision has to be grown as soon as it's articulated. If I was to create a vision statement and then put it into a strategic document and then into the drawer, it will die. I have actually got to allow [others] to grow it... provided I've cast that vision significantly strongly in the first place, they will be in alignment with it and they'll come up with fresh ideas that I haven't thought of.

He explained that this was the *"fun"* part of leadership for him. The ability to share the growth, build the team and watch new things emerge.

As the school community has had a large annual growth rate, Michael has overseen the employment of teams of new staff each year. He described an innovative approach to recruitment practices, which better mirrors the business world than the traditional school environment. Applicants for a teaching position have to survive multiple layers of what Michael described as an *"X-factor"* process. It includes the following: participation in dynamic discussion groups involving all the applicants

and a number of staff, a demonstration of teaching to students and current teachers, a written response to scenarios and a presentation, in any medium they choose, about how they would grow the vision of the school. He spoke of involving teams of current staff and students to provide feedback. He said that many drop out of the process as it unfolds, but he is aware that if they cannot handle these challenges they will probably not be able to embrace the culture of change and innovation. He said they usually end up with a few standout candidates and they do what they can to employ them all. This is an innovative way to employ teachers, which I have not seen practised in any other school.

Michael's leadership depends very much on setting the vision and then empowering others to help him to bring that vision to reality. He made mention that when he addresses staff he speaks only of vision and is critical of long meetings leading to detailed reports. He believes that this way of working kills activity and achievement. Instead he spoke of think tank meetings, conversations in car parks, small working groups, and short presentations (no longer than 10 minutes), which lead to working parties. A philosophy of working to build capacity in others permeated the interview. He said he regretted not moving out of his office earlier, as it is more efficient working with others, as you don't have to 'meet' you just talk. As he said: *"Leadership should never be viewed as a solo activity"*.

I was very interested in how Michael approaches the constraints imposed upon him as an educational leader by the registration requirements imposed by statutory authorities. These requirements involve substantial compliance and documentary evidence with mandated programs and practices. This framework is often seen to

work against innovation and tends to institutionalise conservative practices. As with all his other responses I was surprised by his approach. Rather than rail against the constraints or talk of subversively boycotting them, Michael has been proactive in inviting statutory bodies into the school to review the innovative practices and programs. In these active dialogues he and his team have put forward a strong case for their creative approaches to pedagogy and have received a most positive reception.

One practical example of this disconnect between compliance and creativity recently occurred in their delivery of mandated national testing. Their learning spaces are creative in design and are not set up with desk and chairs in rows as would be expected for a formal examination program. He laughed about the need to scavenge the campus for desks and chairs to meet the requirements. He said that as the staff set it up, it reinforced for them the very reason they have rejected such a constraining physical environment. Michael indicated that they would not allow this once a year requirement to be an impediment to the creative framework under which the school chooses to operate everyday.

Michael's leadership vision is markedly different to other school leaders. In his discussion it is clear that he doesn't choose to see other schools as a benchmark; rather he looks to business models, corporate insights and innovative practices well beyond schools. The design of the new facilities more closely resembles work places and shopping malls than school precincts. He spoke passionately about wanting to provide facilities and opportunities for the students, which mirror the real life world that they will enter when they leave school.

I think a lot of the formal leadership programs in schools miss the point. They are training people for something in the past... They're not looking to how the business world operates; they're not looking to other communities where leadership is inherently different. They are only looking to models of schooling, which is, I think, quite dangerous.

The notions of change, leadership and creativity punctuated the interview with Michael. Through his work, his school and his career his leadership is marked by vision, action and innovation.

Chapter 6 Reflections intertwined

Phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes.

(van Manen, 1990, p. 90)

Creativity in leadership

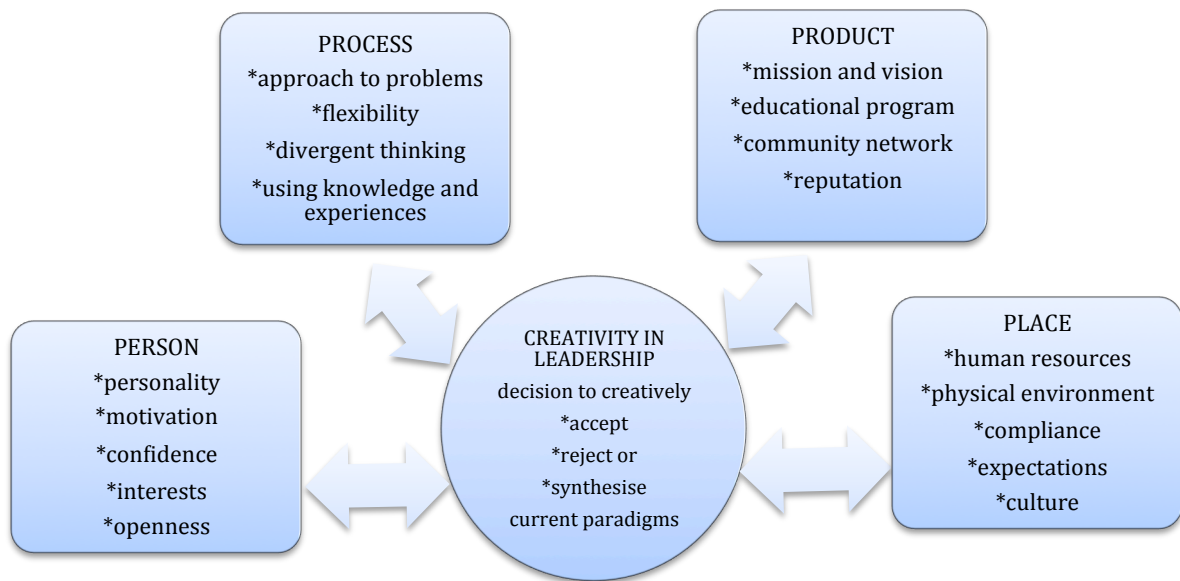
Phenomenology, in its quest to study the very essence of a thing forces us to ask the question: “What is the nature or meaning of something?” (van Manen, 1990, p.184). In drawing conclusions from the interviews that have been captured, considered and analysed it is important to keep the question: “What is the nature of creativity in leadership?” at the forefront of the discussion.

What insights can we glean from the respondents in regards to creativity in leadership? In keeping with the phenomenological approach, the perspectives of the participants were the starting point for the analysis. The interviews allowed me to record, review and analyse the responses of the participants to better understand the phenomenon of creativity in leadership from the perspective of the leaders themselves. The interviews were designed and executed to allow the

participants to express their own ideas and responses and not be directed by a set of prescriptive questions.

Each of the participants in the study brought to the interviews their own understanding of the word “creativity”. Although I generally did not ask direct questions about creativity, wanting the interviews to unfold naturally, the word creativity was a contextual framework and many of the participants came back to the notion of their own accord. One of the principals commented that the invitation to be a participant had led her to think more about creativity, and that this had led her to realise its significance in her leadership. Another participant stated that she “was not at all creative” when initially asked to participate. However, at the end of the interview she acknowledged that she was actively “creating” a particular style of community. Another participant demonstrated through his discussion that in his mind creativity equated with organisational improvement. Two of the interviews, which focussed more on innovation, saw the term creativity linked with futures planning and a more global approach.

To unpack the main themes exposed by the interviews it will be helpful to return to the “Creativity in Leadership Model”. The interviews demonstrated the dynamic relationship between each of the elements and the leader’s creative direction. The two-way arrows reflect the dynamic relationship between the elements and leadership.



Using the four elements as a starting point it was clear to see that they do impact the leadership directions of the principals. In regards to person, the leaders each demonstrated varieties of knowledge, skill, experience and values, which underpin the process of creating. In addition to this, they each displayed unique personality traits, motivation levels and understandings of complexity, which are also noted features of creativity. In regards to process it was clear that each of the principals spoke about their vision to mould and grow their specific community. Although the interviews each demonstrate a different emphasis or particular style of operating, it was clear to see that each principal employed processes to create their learning community. These learning communities and the programs that underpin them are a product of leadership and creativity. Finally, in regards to place, it was clear that the environments in which their leadership is being exercised has impacted and shaped their creative endeavours.

Using the four P's as a framework will be a helpful way to unpack the nature of creativity from the interviews. Taking these headings as a starting point we can identify the common themes or “knots” of each element, which will help us to more fully understand the concept of creativity in leadership. It is in the identification of these “knots” that the essential meaning will become apparent (van Manen, 1990, p. 77).

Person

The interview process highlighted the different personalities of each of the participants, which prompted a number of key themes relevant to creativity in leadership.

Without exception each participant presented a passion for his or her work. Each of them spoke with vigour about their roles. Most of them expressed a love for their work and their intrinsic motivation was evident in the examples that they gave to demonstrate the things they enjoyed about their role. I have selected just one comment from each participant – but there could have been many more:

“I get energised by being a principal”

“It’s exciting and challenging”

“I love the diversity”

“The improvement agenda energises me”

“I love working with staff and students”

“The transformational part of the work is what I am here for.”

“It’s a lot of fun.”

In his analysis of the personality of the creative person Csikszentmihalyi (1996) spoke of the complexity and contradictions that are inherent in the creative personality. The interviews demonstrated these contradictions in various ways. Whilst each person spoke with passion about their role it was also evident that a number of them had also found challenges in the role and had been, or were currently, struggling with parts of it. That these leaders could each express a firm

commitment and intrinsic motivation to a role that would test their capacity and skill to a high degree demonstrates this contradiction. It also suggests that the participants have a predilection for challenge and find satisfaction in performing a role that is complex and demanding. Joshua's assertion that he would leave a school context if he were not able to be a transformative leader illustrated this commitment to challenge and change. Paul also asserted that if he stopped being "*disturbed by new possibilities*" then he would no longer be a useful principal. Peter also stated "*I enjoy especially the intellectual challenge of conceiving the school.*" It seemed apparent that the intrinsic motivation they each displayed was linked to the level of challenge and complexity that the role demands. Although a few of them expressed concern at the time constraints that they felt in their roles, none of them expressed concern that the role itself was too difficult or too challenging. It is interesting to note that these reflections exemplify the commonalities between transformational and instructional leadership noted by Hallinger (2003) being: shared purpose, goal setting, intellectual stimulation and modelling values.

Another contradiction or tension evident in the personalities of each of the participants was a clear strength of mind or character, balanced by flexibility when caring for people. In their descriptions of difficult challenges all of the participants illustrated resolve in crisis. They also spoke strongly about their values and visions and each one presented strength of character that probably sets them apart as leaders. One participant said: "*I won't let a blockage ultimately stop what we're going to do.*" There was a confidence in almost all of the interviews that indicated a strong sense of purpose. However, in each interview there were also indications

of a more vulnerable side with a nurturing focus displayed in their anecdotes. A number of participants expressed personal vulnerabilities or weaknesses and were willing to note mistakes they had made. One participant stated: *“I am not blessed with a huge self-confidence”* but also expressed his resolve to present a strong direction to the school. Sprinkled amongst performance management decisions, which required strength of purpose, were examples of caring for staff in time-consuming ways. In the same way each participant could be described as ambitious, in regards to the energy that they are pouring into their roles and their schools, however it was also clear that in a number of ways they had each demonstrated a selfless approach in their leadership. Examples of this include Sonia spending three hours with a family in a hospital, Michael working to break the poverty cycle in an overseas context, and Peter spending little time on himself as he served the school community. This ability to display in one person what should be two opposing approaches demonstrates what Csikszentmihalyi (1996) argues is the basic contradiction inherent in the creative person.

The final contradiction evident in each of the interviews was a sense of traditionalism versus innovation. Each participant articulated their awareness of the heritage of the school they are leading, and spoke about the way in which it shaped their leadership decisions. These tensions demonstrate Sternberg’s “Systems Model of Leadership” (2007) well as the participants demonstrated a synthesis of wisdom, intelligence and creativity to balance both past and future considerations. The leaders each made choices about whether to accept, reject or integrate the status quo. Paul’s school is steeped in tradition and he spoke about the challenges of being a change agent in a conservative context. He seems to have

met this challenge with a very careful balancing act – getting buy in from the stakeholders, building a collegial base for decision making, celebrating the success his leadership had brought, and aiming to engender what he called “*a normalisation of creative thinking*”. In this regard Paul has made the choice to reconstructively redirect the organisation, that is, to use the past as a starting point for something new. This enables him to reject the status quo and be creative in his leadership, whilst at the same time recognising and respecting the significance of tradition in the school. Jean, on the other hand, has chosen to accept the status quo of her school but to redefine it in ways which will bring incremental change. She spoke of one example of changing the ways in which the academic results were celebrated each year to ensure that the success of the students was brought to the fore. Michael was the only leader who articulated a clear rejection of the status quo. He inherited his school when it was struggling and he describes his leadership context as “*a fresh slate*”. Sonia demonstrated experience in two very different schools, the first one where she needed to reject the status quo and be a directive leader and the second where she was able to accept the status quo and merely “*tweak*” it for improvement. The leaders demonstrated that their approaches to tradition and innovation were designed to creatively reinforce, change or rethink the environment they were leading as demonstrated at the centre of the “Creativity in Leadership Model”.

The ability to deal with the dynamics of both tradition and innovation is illustrative of Osborn, Hunt and Jauch’s (2002) contextual leadership theory. The examples above illustrate the ways in which effective leadership is socially constructed and sensitive to contextual dimensions. The participants each

demonstrated creativity in leadership in the ways in which they read their school contexts, identified the most effective approach, and then chose their strategy. They also showed sensitivity to organisational variables and relationship webs as noted by Hunt and Dodge (2000).

Experience and expertise have long been noted as relevant to the creative person and studies have suggested that ten years experience in the field is a precursor for creative achievement (Weisberg, 2006). In this regard experience may be useful in learning how to solve problems and to understand the complexities of the field. In the interviews two of the participants had been in the role of principal for less than five years. Five had been in the role for more than thirteen years and three of the participants had been in the role for more than twenty years. The principals who had been in the role for the longest certainly demonstrated a clarity of thought and focus, however the participant who had been in the role for the shortest amount of time demonstrated a clear ability to discuss the complexities of the role. Although she could not compare her current headship with any past experience she called upon her observation of other leaders to provide contrast to the insights she was sharing. The other principal with the least experience did articulate difficulties in solving problems but this may be more attributable to the very challenging context rather than to time in the role.

Linked to the notion of experience in the role is leader cognition and the accompanying evaluative skills identified by Mumford, Connelly and Gadis (Mumford et al., 2003). Each of the participants demonstrated a sophisticated ability to reflect on their own leadership and the capacity to reflect and learn from

achievements and mistakes was well articulated throughout each of the interviews. I will list just a few of the comments from each of the participants, which demonstrate this capacity to reflect, evaluate and learn:

“I don’t have the skills to do it that way because my mind doesn’t work like that.”

“In hindsight I wouldn’t do it that way again.”

“I am not a small detail man.”

“Experience and the literature show that a grab bag of one off and unconnected ideas isn’t going to be particularly helpful.”

“I felt it still wasn’t as consistent...I still think its been hit and miss in some areas of the school.”

“I am a restless personality type...I rarely look back with great self-satisfaction or self-congratulations at the end of any project.”

“Sometimes I’ll have ideas and cant understand why everyone else is not as excited by them as me.”

Another personality trait that is commonly mentioned in the research is the willingness to take risks. Many of the principals demonstrated through their stories that they had taken substantial risks in their leadership. For some it was bringing change to a culture, or developing property for the school, or charting new directions. On the personal level Paul articulated the fact that as he had grown in his leadership role he became more comfortable with taking risks and saw himself as willing to make mistakes. Speaking from what he described as a risk averse context, Joshua spoke of the importance of training students in being able to take intellectual and material risks. He articulated this as an important element of

learning to think and be a leader. Michael spoke of risk taking in a way that encompassed the personal, the educational and the organisational levels. Programs, buildings, staffing and futures planning have all had elements of risk attached to them. His immediate response to a question about risk taking was: *“Always encouraged.”* He identified one of his achievements as building a *“culture of risk taking”* but was quick to qualify that it is always measured risk particularly in light of budget constraints. These examples illustrate the findings of Stoll and Temperley (2009) and Sternberg (2006) by demonstrating a willingness to take risks as part of the process of modelling and promoting creativity.

The ability to see potential and possibility was another personal trait evident in each of the participants. In keeping with the research (Harris, 2009) this ability to see possibilities was evident at both the micro and macro levels. Paul spoke of *“dreaming and scheming”* whilst Joshua expressed his aim as: *“To see that which is not there now”*. Peter spoke of his role as *“imagining the school”* and used an artistic metaphor to describe the school as the *“canvas on which I paint”*. Michael often used the word *“opportunity”* and he stated: *“There’s still so much possibility and potential.”* There was only one participant who expressed some question as to whether the possibilities he would like to see unfold were possible in his current environment. The fact that he could articulate the missing elements demonstrated his ability to envisage possibilities. However, his understanding of the financial constraints of the school precluded him from articulating a confidence that they could be realised.

The traits of efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience articulated by Sweetman et al. (2011) were generally evident in the participants. Sonia described herself as an optimist and an idealist. Joshua admitted to being an “*immense idealist*” and Paul said he was “*captivated by what could be done*” in his role. The principals are in charge of independent schools that are all aligned with different denominations of Christian churches. Almost all the participants spoke in some manner about the ways in which their faith informs their leadership. Some aspire to model their work on the example of Christ; others expressed a commitment to community service whilst others spoke of a mission to share the gospel with the community. In terms of resilience, a number of the participants outlined very difficult challenges that they had faced. In their descriptions of the situations it was evident that the ability to bounce back from set-backs was a common trait. One of the principals described their resilience in this way: “*I don’t mind working through [challenges] and I can do it without taking a huge hit on my own emotions.*” Another echoed a similar sentiment: “*I don’t seem to get particularly stressed about things at school, I suppose that’s one reason why I’ve survived so long in the role.*”

The interview process itself prompted a range of discussions regarding creativity and its link to leadership. During her interview Jean expressed her personal view that being a creative person was not necessarily a requirement of the principal role. She noted that a “creative personality” might not have the other required skills of a principal such as executing the managerial complexities of the role. In contrast to this she described principals she had observed who could be better described as managers than leaders. She said that these managers may have fulfilled the duties

of the role but she felt they lacked an inspirational edge. She believes that the ability to set the vision and inspire others was an essential part of the leadership role. Her comments reveal an interesting dichotomy. It is not necessarily a creative personality that will find success as a principal. But an understanding of creativity and leadership would assist a principal to employ the best aspects of creativity in the complex roles of both management and leadership.

Process

Each of the participants alluded to problem solving in some manner in their interviews. Some gave examples of problems they had faced and reflected upon the processes they had engaged to solve them. Paul spoke of the temporary committees that he prefers to use. Staff members brainstorm “problems” over lunch and then as a group they choose a number to address. Temporary committees are formed and the problems are addressed. He spoke of the broad collegial base of this approach and the ways in which he uses active staff groups to gather information, generate ideas and solve problems. This supports the theoretical model proposed by Amabile and Mueller (2008) where problem solving is seen to be pivotal to the creative process. Similarly Peter spoke of the use of committees to devolve decision-making and both Paul and Peter acknowledged that as leaders they seek to empower the staff below them to take initiative, make decisions and improve the organisation. These processes demonstrate key features of transformational leadership in action.

Sonia saw her problem solving as one of the creative marks of her leadership. In describing one staff problem she articulated a very clear and deliberate structure. In a performance measurement scenario she used clear and easily explained steps. Ensuring that the processes are well planned and executed is important to her leadership. Similarly Jean spoke with confidence about problem solving and the need to take time and money to come up with creative solutions. Employing an external mediator was one example of a process she employed to address a problem. Matthew spoke of his frustration with a lack of support in problem solving and his inability to seek external advice for serious matters. Peter described the steps involved in a serious matter for the school, which demonstrated the complexity of these leadership roles. In his response he articulated a need to consider the perpetrator, the school community and the school council whilst covering legal matters and reputational risks for the school. The process of problem solving was an important consideration mentioned by each of the leaders who were interviewed.

Linked to the notion of problem solving is problem finding, which is that gap between what you have and what you want (Puccio et al., 2011). Theorists speak of this dissonance (Stoll & Temperley, 2009) as a catalyst for change and creativity. In the interviews a number of the participants mentioned the tensions they perceived in their roles and articulated something of this dissonance. Jean said:

The creative person is the person who can take a tension between two things and make something out of it. If I do my job well I will come up with a new, different and innovative way to find a way

through the tensions that exist between staff, the tensions that exist with the students or where parts of the school aren't working well. I can take that tension and make something new and better out of it.

Joshua saw tensions between his vision of leadership and the school's expectations of his leadership. Feeling uncomfortable in a role that may be affirming a culture rather than transforming it had created a tension for him. He sought to be a “*shaper*” of culture rather than a “*custodian*” of culture and spoke of the processes he employed to deal with this tension. Listening, waiting and writing were three of the strategies he was putting to effect. In his interview he compared this tenure to a previous school, where change was driven by “*crisis*”. Problem finding in that context was simple. He noted that in his present role he was seeking to “*ignite some discomfort*” to allow him to make cultural shifts. This is an active example of problem finding to bring about innovation.

The interviews well demonstrated the notion that a balance of both divergent and convergent thinking will best promote creativity (Acar & Runco, 2012). The interview with Michael was probably the clearest example of this balance at work. Michael's leadership is marked by divergent thinking practices and his own leadership encourages others to take risks and invest in new practices. He stated: “*If as a leader you are not prepared to allow creativity you are going to stifle a community.*” He described the change process that he employs as: “*observed vision, grow, ideate, act and evaluate*”. He said:

So if I've got a teacher who's come in over night and has been thinking of all of these ideas, well we resource it to put it into action, and then as a result of that we will evaluate.

This leadership approach, transformational in style, is employed to stimulate creativity in the individual and in the organisation. The process supports organisational innovation and demonstrates creativity in leadership.

Many of the processes and practices of the school are clearly the result of divergent thinking being widely encouraged. At the same time the previous quotation from Michael (see above) shows the evaluative process identified by Puccio and Mance (2011) as central to convergent thinking. There were also examples in the interview with Michael that demonstrated an understanding of the need for both original and traditional thinking at different times. One example is that the descriptors for staff leadership responsibilities have been reimaged to reflect the divergent approach. However, they are aware that these leadership titles need to be recognisable in the broader educational context so staff members have both an internal and external title. For example the “Deputy Principal Teaching and Learning” might be better known as the “Learning Activist” at school. Such divergent thinking supports and perpetuates the creative approach of the organisation.

A number of the interviews demonstrated complex leadership in action where the leader creates the environments or conditions necessary for innovations to occur. Paul spoke about creating short-term committees to brainstorm ideas for innovations and a program of assisting staff to network with other schools to help them to review and redesign their own organisation. Creative ways to promote “interaction, interdependency and diversity” (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007) were demonstrated in the anecdotes of almost all the leaders.

It was interesting to test the model provided by Stoll and Temperley (2009) in regards to the processes they suggest are necessary for the promotion of creativity. Referring exclusively to the interview with Michael there was a very strong correlation between the theory and the practice. See table below:

Processes required for the promotion of creativity	Examples from interview with Michael
Model creativity and risk-taking	Remove committee structure and institute think tanks
Stimulate a sense of urgency	Staff directed to act upon ideas and then evaluate them
Expose colleagues to new thinking and experiences	Teams of staff regularly visit other schools
Self-consciously relinquish control	Vision diagram was rewritten by a staff member and improved
Provide time and space and facilitate the practicalities	Focus on learning spaces and practicalities of their design is a priority
Promote individual and collaborative creative thinking and design	Staff visit external sites to consider design options
Set high expectations about the degree of creativity	Think tanks regularly exploring new ideas
Use failure as a learning opportunity	Student discipline through a lense of growth rather than punitive structures
Keep referring back to core values	Whenever staff gather the creative vision is articulated by the principal

A similar table could have been completed for other participants with varying degrees of completeness.

Product

The aim of this study was not to measure or score the level of creativity demonstrated by individual leaders in the schools they led. The discussion of “product” then will also not focus on empirically measuring the success of the school. Rather it will consider the participant’s view of their schools and how their role shapes it. The complexity of a school as a product is important to recognise. Using the work of Dinham et al. (Dinham et al., 2011) the notion of “capital formation” as an umbrella term denoting the complex web of systems, programs and relationships will be useful in the consideration of “product”. In each of the interviews the participants noted features of their schools that suggested or illustrated creativity. These included domain specific features such as teaching programs, human resources, professional development, mission and vision and culture. These features are part of the “capital formation” and will be reviewed as the product.

A number of the participants spoke about the ways in which their teaching programs were being developed or changed to accommodate a creative approach. Paul identified the promotion of wonder, emotional intelligence and experiential learning as key drivers in his school programs.

I just don't want to build a Science Centre; I want the school to contribute to knowledge. I want creativity to be inspired in the students. We will have panels cut out of the walls to show compression or principles of triangulation in construction. There will be grey water recycling; I want photo voltaic cells and so on.

There will be twenty different leaning stations where the building itself will actually “speak” to the students. I want the building to be a place of wonder.

Michael outlined a number of innovative approaches to learning and gave examples of specific learning programs. One of his examples demonstrated the importance of linking learning with vision and his commitment to embedding creativity, or possibility thinking, into every avenue of the school’s learning platform. He said:

Everything is about opportunities, whether it’s sport, music, extension and including faith. Faith is an opportunity in life, you’ve got to learn what it is, learn to recognise it, and learn how to take it up. Everything in a school journey now is about recognising opportunities from kindergarten to year 12. Teaching kids to identify opportunities, then embrace them, and then actually implement them. It’s a more active process.

In regards to human resources every participant spoke of the importance of staff in creating the product that is the school. Although some of their observations were regarding difficulties in regards to personnel, many of them noted the importance of engaging staff with the capital formation of the school. Peter said:

I don’t see myself as a solo leader and what I want to do with my authority is to give it away, and to prepare other people who are skilful in order to extend the footprint of the whole organisation. My role is to unleash, ignite and empower people.

Joshua articulated the need to engage with the community and highlighted a number of specific examples where communicating with students, parents and staff was important. He summed up his approach to this communication with this comment:

Don't take things at face value. Search for the "why" question and the "why not" question and listen carefully to what people are saying to you. What they are really saying to you. They're immensely important, and in fact they fuel me, they keep my mind alert and my imagination fired up.

Mission and vision were a central theme to all the participants. It was clear that as leaders they are aware of their need to articulate clearly the school's central mission and the purposes they have in their leadership. The interviews well illustrated Harris' (2009) comment that leadership is all about influence and change. Mixed with this was a clear understanding of the distinct culture of the school and whether they were happy affirming that culture or seeking to reinvent it. Jean said the articulation of vision was a central part of her role and spoke about the ways in which she used assemblies to communicate vision to the students. Peter had a transformational focus on the intellectual and practical outworking of the Christian faith. Sonia's mission to create a relational focus in her school was described in a variety of ways and evidence of community building peppered the interview. Matthew described his mission to rebuild an ailing school and described a cultural context in need of substantial change and

improvement. The expression of the mission for him vacillated between small picture roadblocks and big picture vision. Joshua explained that he felt impelled to transform a community that was seeking to keep the status quo. Michael's mission and vision is revolutionary and ideologically challenging. This is front and centre to his role as principal and he stated that he only speaks about vision when addressing the staff. Finally Paul articulated his purpose to creatively reinvent his school with a clear futures focus, whilst respecting and celebrating the traditions of the culture.

I am aware that a discussion of the mission and vision of the participants is difficult to provide in brief. As each of the participants spoke it was evident that they were cognisant of the fact that they are responsible for the creation and development of the school community and that their leadership role requires them to articulate and enact vision (Muijs, 2010). For some this was part of the excitement of the role. Statements such as *"I was captivated by the thought of what could be done here"*, *"I enjoy especially the conceiving of the school"* or *"the transformational part of the work is what I'm here for"* all illustrate this commitment to vision casting. Some of the participants expressed an understanding of the weight of this responsibility and spoke of the *"the size of the role and its stresses"* or alternatively the constancy of the burden: *"I can't afford to take my eye off this area"*. One participant stated: *"my decisions can have the power to change somebody's life"*. The participants were all aware of the significance of setting vision and enacting it.

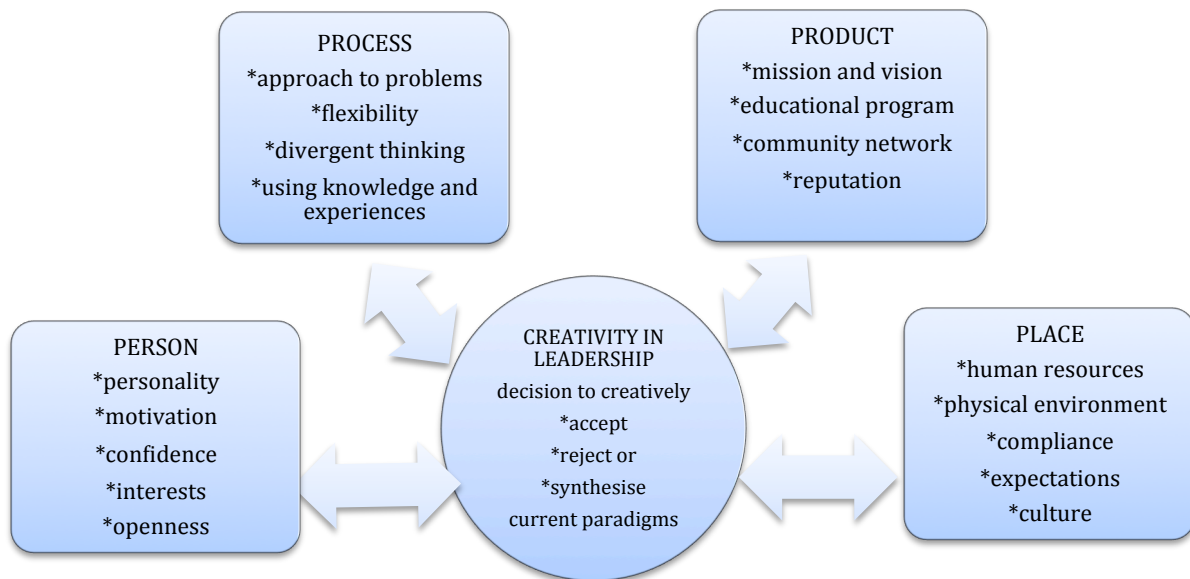
Place

The environment or place in which the leader exercises his or her creativity was important in all the interviews and demonstrated contextual leadership in action (Osborn & Marion, 2009). All of the participants who had had been leaders in other schools specifically mentioned their previous experience and in most cases compared it to their current situation. Peter is currently head of his third school and compared the challenges of each environment. His first experience was as foundational principal and he noted the creative aspect needed to grow a school from nothing to well over a thousand students. He commented that this environment needed “*big picture*” decisions as well as “*selecting photocopiers*” demonstrating the diversity of leadership and management skills required. He identified cultural development as the pressure he faced in his second school. He said his challenge was to tilt the seesaw from a grammar school to a more authentic Christian model and he admitted that this involved creativity as his direction was “*rattling people’s cages*”. In his current school he was negotiating a difficult political and religious landscape and his experience had taught him to communicate “*well and often*” with a range of stakeholders to secure stability. He described the pressure in this way: “*It’s a proving landscape working out where the trees are not to run into, where the mineshafts are not to fall down.*”

Sonia’s comments regarding an earlier headship were insightful. She demonstrated an understanding of the need to present different styles of leadership in different contexts. She noted that she could not be a collaborative leader in a “*broken school*” but sometimes needed to take charge and be directive rather than

empowering. She said: *“I had to sometimes just say: ‘its happening and bad luck if you don’t agree with me’”*. The directive style of leadership, which she employed in this context, was clearly at odds with her preferred approach. She said, *“I was a very different principal in that school to the principal that I can be in this school.”* In the bulk of the interview she presented a clear focus on caring for people and creating a warm and supportive environment.

These two examples demonstrate the relevance of the “Creativity in Leadership Model”.



In each of their schools these two leaders have made decisions regarding the focus and style of their leadership to effectively manage their new environment. The fact that these approaches may differ greatly whilst being exercised by the same person demonstrates the significance of that environment in the act of creating. Although a naturally pastoral leader, Sonia chose what she described to be a *“dictatorial”*

style to ensure that her leadership brought about the changes required. Both Peter and Sonia evaluated the product with which they were working and chose processes that would deliver change. They both recognised the significance of creativity in this, as they weighed up the complexities and challenges of each environment and crafted their own leadership styles accordingly. It also demonstrates that it is not a simple linear movement from creativity in leadership to place. As environments develop and change the leader is required to respond accordingly and whether it is big picture, small picture, culture building or dismantling, creative decisions will be required. This is in keeping with the reciprocal effects model articulated by Hallinger (2008) that states that both educational outcomes and school environment will equally determine the style of principal leadership.

The interview with Matthew clearly demonstrated the notion that constraints and pressures in the work environment can be detrimental to creativity. He spoke at length about financial concerns, his reluctance to delegate leadership and the pressures he felt regarding enrolment numbers. He said these constraints required him to focus on a narrow set of performance criteria, such as efficiencies, school growth and student safety. His control of the ways in which the teaching and learning programs were being developed and implemented demonstrated a tendency to embrace an instructional leadership approach. His oversight of the timetable was one example of this. He said that he would like to more creatively address teaching and learning matters in the school but felt constrained to do this. He said: *"The more I am in the classrooms the worse it makes me feel, and the more I wish that I could spend time that way."* This is a clear example of the

notion of situated freedom (Valle & Halling, 1989) as Matthew's choice to work more creatively is limited by his situation.

Matthew was not the only leader to mention human resources as a challenge in his leadership. Almost all of the principals mentioned staff issues as a pressure, particularly in the realm of performance management. Both Sonia and Jean outlined examples of staffing issues, which required them to think creatively and find solutions that would support both the needs of the individual and the school. Their creative solutions, however, relied upon healthy budgets, which allowed them to support staff whilst covering the required classes. Discretionary power in the budget was not available to Matthew and he perceived that the limits he faced on resourcing precluded him from creatively solving staffing issues.

The physical environment of each school was another important factor in the consideration of creativity. A number of the principals spoke about building programs or site improvements, which allowed them to creatively expand their operations. Both Paul and Michael addressed the need for the physical spaces to support creative learning and have exercised leadership in this field. Paul said: "*I don't know why people ever build classrooms.*" Instead he spoke of designing learning centres that are "*places of wonder*" outfitted with learning stations and large screens with conundrums to stimulate thinking. The interview with Michael began and ended with tangible evidence that the physical environment is a key creative feature of his leadership. He spoke of his vision of providing what he termed a "*professional space*" instead of a classroom. He also outlined creative ways in which he engaged with staff to get design briefs formulated. One example

involved visits to inspiring public spaces and time spent on his behalf challenging the staff's preconceived notions of what a learning space could be. From this example, and referring again to the model, it is clear that place and process are also linked, and that divergent thinking and the use of creative strategies to bring others on board are both demonstrated in the work of these two leaders.

The need to demonstrate compliance with mandated programming and testing regimes was directly mentioned as a pressure by two of the participants. In the context of discussing the importance of creating the future Paul spoke of conversations he has had with other educational leaders, in Australia and overseas, where they have discussed their concern with a rise in accountability and the promotion of league tables. In the Australian context the My School Website and the mandatory national NAPLAN testing have been recent compliance requirements for principals. His approach is to rally others and to personally speak and write both in his school context and in the public domain using the media to stir debate. He is keen to counter the “*strict empirical measurement*” in education and work to create a rich, active educational environment that promotes values, skills, thinking and relationships. Despite a clearly articulated frustration at compliance and testing he was optimistic in this regard. He sees opportunities in the national and international connections, which he has created and spoke of being a leader of a “*counter reformation*”, which would see change for the better. Towards the end of the interview he said:

I think the opportunities for creativity are increasing. I think with partnerships, the whole internationalisation of it, the fact that education is going to be seen as more holistic, it is genuinely

going to change. Education for the last three or four hundred years hasn't changed very much, but I think it is going to change quite dramatically.

Michael was the other principal who articulated his frustration with the national testing regime, which does not match with the creative educational paradigm of his school. Michael has not let this deter his reform agenda and he has actively engaged with the registration body to ensure that the creative programming is understood to be compliant. He has also taken steps to facilitate the annual testing program despite the challenge it brings to their creatively designed physical environment.

A few conclusions about compliance and creativity can be drawn from the responses of these two educational leaders. Both leaders have decided to creatively reject the philosophical framework of test driven education whilst acknowledging that they need to comply with the current demands. In establishing more creative learning contexts both principals relegate accountability measures as a low priority in their schools. In their interviews they both articulated the need to engage with authorities to challenge the assumptions and to press for change. They are also actively engaging with government and educational experts to bring about change. In keeping with the spirit of globalisation and in promoting the best features of the knowledge society they regularly visit national and international schools, engage with policy makers and researchers, and are abreast of international trends. This is in keeping with the research findings of Shalley and Gibson (2004) that identify

contact with external others as an organisational factor which promotes creativity in the work environment.

Another pressure evident in the interviews with the principals was the issue of time. Three of the participants mentioned it as a factor that impacts upon their leadership. Peter spoke of the need to spend substantial amounts of time with people and the tension between *“people and tasks”*. He said, *“it takes long hours to be visible”*, and noted the need to attend, and to speak at a large number of meetings and events. He also noted the limited amount of family time or recreational time as by products of this pressure. Sonia also noted this time constraint and similarly noted that the cost was borne by her personal relationships and own well being. She felt that the level at which she was working was not sustainable – but spoke of changes needing to be brought in for her successor rather than for herself. Matthew also noted time as a constraint, but in his tightly budgeted context, the lack of time was seen to be an impediment to his own effectiveness in his role. He said the need to focus on certain areas precluded him from spending time with teachers and teacher leaders and so he felt that a lack of time was a constraint to the creativity of his leadership.

In keeping with the ideas of complex leadership each of the participants noted the importance of networks both within and outside their schools. They spoke of the opportunities and the challenges that occur within those networks and articulated various strategies for engaging with them. Joshua, Jean and Peter spoke of the ways they use language and symbol to give life to a vision. In this regard they demonstrated the theory of complex leadership in their seeding of ideas and their

need to entrust them to others to implement. The same three participants all gave examples of difficulties with people in the school community and outlined a range of strategies that they use to bring change in performance. Again, the solutions were found in communication and illustrate the social construction of leadership as articulated by the complexity theorists (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007). Without exception all the participants demonstrated the qualities of enabling leaders (Marion, 2012).

Chapter 7 Conclusions – Weaving the strands together

*When the most famous creators and leaders are under scrutiny,
the distinction between creativity and leadership vanishes
because creativity becomes a variety of leadership.*

(Simonton, 1984, p. 181)

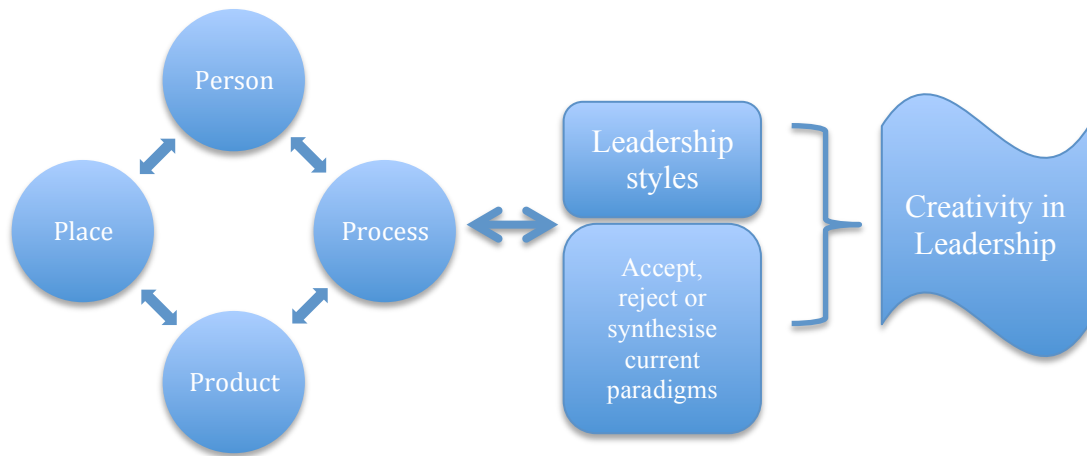
Conclusions

This study has explored the importance of creativity to the role of the educational leader. In the context of unrelenting technological and societal change these leaders have the responsibility to imagine and shape their educational communities. The interviews with seven educational leaders demonstrate that this imagining and shaping requires creativity. Despite limited research on the topic, or specific training in the area, these principals regularly demonstrate creative approaches in dealing with the challenges they face. The findings pointed to certain tensions they face and the contextual imperatives that frame their choices. Gardner (2008), Robinson (2011) and other scholars (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010) call for a more creative approach to education, leaving behind the industrial model of instruction which so many schools still employ. The interviews support this futures thinking and demonstrate a willingness on the part of the leaders themselves to embrace a more creative and forward thinking approach.

With reference to the work of Dinham et al. (2011) the role of the educational leader can be considered as overseeing capital formation. Dinham notes that the higher order elements of symbolism and culture building are key to the success of educational leaders. The leadership skills required for this culture shaping are complex. The interviews uncovered many of the challenges faced by these leaders in this work. Each participant spoke in detail about the culture of their school environment and without exception the process of supporting, developing and redefining that culture underpinned each interview. As each participant spoke of the challenges they were facing they were all in some way related to capital formation. This research has highlighted the carefully considered strategies, which are employed by the leaders in the creation of their communities.

In reviewing the insights gained from the interviews, time was spent considering the applicability of the “Creativity in Leadership Model”. The original model highlighted the dynamic interaction of the four elements: person, process, product and place with the notion of creativity in leadership at the centre. The centrality was moderated by the leader’s intention to creatively accept, reject or synthesise current paradigms. Although the interviews confirmed the relevance of the model there were aspects of the logic that needed amending. It is clear from the interviews that the four elements overlap and inform one another. The place impacts the person and the processes impact the product and the same could be said of every combination of elements. To incorporate this logic the representation has been changed to a circular design to better represent the interplay. The updated “Creativity in Leadership Model” is below:

Creativity in Leadership – a developing model



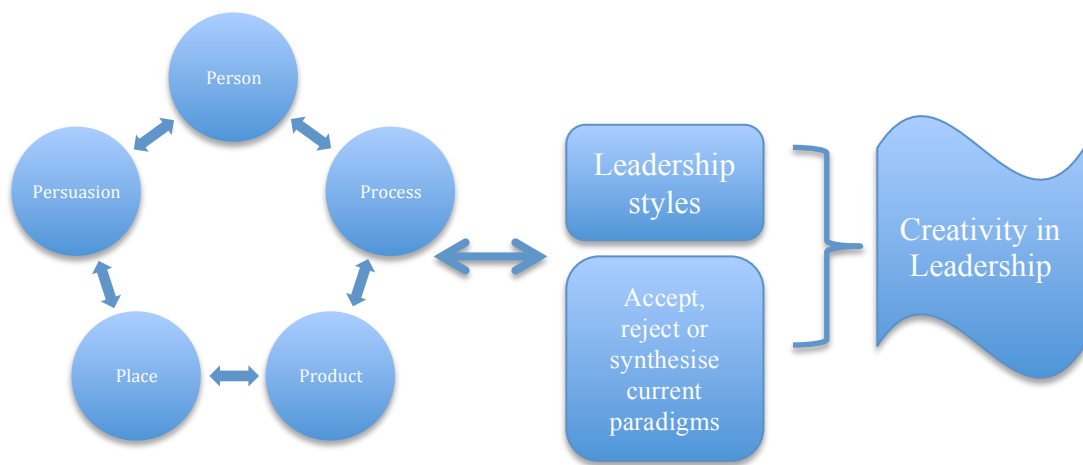
Reviewing the new model it is clear that the dynamic of the four elements leaves the leader with two decisions. Firstly they must decide whether to accept, reject, synthesise or modify their current leadership paradigms and then decide what style of leadership is best suited to the task. Each leader interviewed demonstrated this process in action. Some of the leaders demonstrated that their decisions in previous leadership roles had been different to their current role. One participant spoke of her first school, where she chose to reject the status quo and needed to employ a directive approach. She compared that to her current school where she felt she could accept the paradigm and be a consultative leader. Without exception each of the participants expressed through their anecdotes whether they were accepting, rejecting or synthesising the environmental paradigms they were overseeing. They also demonstrated or suggested their chosen leadership style. It is this very ability to juggle the interactive elements of person, process, product and place and make decisions about the paradigm and the leadership style that encapsulates the notion of creativity in leadership.

There is one final refinement to the model, stemming from research into creativity and that the interviews have revealed to be important. Each of the participants spoke in some way about the need for strategic communication with their stakeholders. Almost all of them alluded to the importance of communicating with the school community and sharing symbolic messages or vision statements. All of them mentioned communication in some capacity, referring to staff, students or families. In addition to this, a number spoke about the importance of communicating with peers and experts nationally and internationally. For some this is about sharing what they are doing and for others it is about learning and growing their own professional capacity and the school's capital. Although traditionally researchers have referred to the four P's of creativity (Kozbelt et al., 2010), Simonton (1990) has suggested a fifth element "persuasion". This fifth element has been demonstrated by the participants and was shown to be important in their leadership and so it will be incorporated into the model.

This concept of persuasion follows the logic that creative people change the way others think, so they must be persuasive to be recognised as creative (Kozbelt et al., 2010). This is in keeping with Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity whereby creative people impact the wider society and influence the domain in which they work. From the interviews conducted it was apparent that many of the participants are recognised for their creativity and for the ways in which they are influencing the educational domain. In fact the selection process, which gathered nominations from experts in independent education bodies, would suggest that their peers regard a number of the participants to be creatively "persuasive". This is not surprising, as the role of principal demands the ability to communicate

effectively and influence a broad range of people. If principals were creative in their leadership it would follow that they “persuade” others and influence the domain. The amended and final “Creativity in Leadership Model” is below:

A Model for Creativity in Leadership



Considering the end point of the model above, the study has highlighted a number of important features that correlate with creativity in leadership. The creative leaders all demonstrated a passion and commitment for their work, which was driven by a sense of intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation. This is in keeping with Amabile’s (1979) conclusion that exceptional individuals internalise the norms and standards of their work. Each of the leaders demonstrated a predilection for challenge and was clearly able to find satisfaction in a role that is complex and demanding. Although the leaders articulated a strong sense of purpose their stories showed a willingness to be flexible when caring for people. Linked with this was an awareness of personal vulnerabilities and a willingness to note weakness. The

leaders were each clearly ambitious for their organisations but were also remarkably selfless in the ways in which they approached their responsibilities and their mission. Finally, in regards to their personal characteristics, the leaders each demonstrated the traits of efficacy, optimism and resilience.

In regards to process there were a number of common approaches, which indicated the principal's ability to connect creativity with leadership. Each of the leaders interviewed had learnt from their experiences and reflected on the ways in which they had made wiser decisions because of their own experiences. These capacities demanded both clarity of thought and an ability to reflect on leadership.

Other processes which linked creativity with leadership included: a willingness to take risks, the ability to see potential and possibility, and an energy for problem solving and problem finding. To be an effective problem solver the creative leader was able to demonstrate a balance between convergent and divergent thinking. Similarly the leaders interviewed were able to both articulate and enact vision. This was made easier by the fact that they were able to communicate effectively with a range of stakeholders and each clearly understood the importance of the social construction of leadership.

The product of creativity in leadership was demonstrated in the interviews as "capital formation" (Dinham et al., 2011) where a complex web of systems, programs and relationships work together to positive effect. The leaders spoke in different ways about their interactions with staff and although there were clearly challenges in each school the outcome of effective leadership meant that staff felt

empowered and there was an effective engagement with students, staff, parents and wider community. Each of the participants also demonstrated the importance of external networks and the ways in which these connections enhanced their own leadership. In this way, they all shared the ability to strategically work towards “capital formation”.

The study considered the significance of place or context to leadership. The leaders each demonstrated an ability to understand and evaluate the school contexts in which they had been leaders and then were each able to select and enact a suitably effective leadership strategy appropriate to place and time. For some this meant embracing the culture, for others it meant changing it. Whatever the approach it was clear with each participant that culture was well understood and was either celebrated or reinvented. To do this successfully an ability to understand and balance both tradition and innovation was evident. The ability to understand context means that human and physical resources can be maximised.

The interviews uncovered an effective interaction with the changing demands of the knowledge society and the increasingly global perspective, including the unique pressures facing the global teenager. Paul spoke of the ways in which “*knowledge engines*” were bringing such radical changes to the world and newfound pressures on young people. To counter this move away from the human dimension of learning and development he promotes a strong focus on character development, experiential learning and educational opportunities designed to boost emotional intelligence, social skills and problem solving. In addition to this he spoke at length about his connections with educators and thinkers around the

world and the strategies they could employ to “*actually create the future*” together. In a similar way Joshua has committed his leadership to work against the spirit of the age: in his words a “*materialist, secular and transactional culture*”. He has approached this through the learning and pastoral programs, opportunities to work with staff groups and by carefully communicating with the wider community.

In a different way Jean is mobilising the cultural energy of her community to provide pastoral support and to promote shared values in the face of challenging social pressures. She said: “*the cultural heritage actually imbues the way the school runs*”. One of the challenges faced by Matthew in the context of a knowledge society, was recognition of the generation gap, specifically the divide between the students’ willingness to engage with technology and the technological engagement of the parents. Moving to online provision of information was proving to be a challenge for the school and work was planned to provide options and communicate strategies. In regards to the modern tendency to skim information rather than to think deeply, a number of the principals spoke of their commitment to promoting active learning and problem solving. Michael has engaged his students to redesign their learning spaces and equipment; Sonia was taking students overseas to allow them to immerse themselves in another culture and to learn deeply about it and Paul was creating a new building to be a “*place of wonder*” to inspire the students to be “*in pursuit of knowledge*” rather than having “*knowledge in pursuit of the student*”. It is clear that each of the educational leaders was sensitive to the changing demands of the modern world and were

engaging with their school communities in ways which will promote Gardner's "Five Minds for the Future" (2008).

Further Research

Just as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) called for research in creativity to move from a focus on the individual to a systemic perspective, the study highlighted the significance of contextual imperatives to the resulting patterns of leadership and creativity. The interviews confirmed the significance of context and demonstrated some of the ways in which organisational pressures can shape change, leadership and creativity. Marion and Uhl-Bien (2001) use the framework of complexity theory to suggest that leaders are only one part of an interactive network "that is far bigger than they". They state: "Complex leaders can perceive those networks; they can help enable useful behaviours, including the expansion and complexification of the networks. They cannot, however, control those networks." (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, p. 414). It was clear in the interviews that the principals were using their leadership skills to shape the creative development of their schools, but it was also clear that the schools themselves were shaping the responses of the leaders. Each of them spoke about the solutions they were bringing to problems and without exception those solutions were in some ways shaped by the context. Financial, structural, contextual, political and social pressures were apparent in the interviews and did have an impact upon the leadership decisions made. It is essential that contextual matters be considered in further research.

Another critical factor highlighted in the interviews was the significance of tension and contradiction. One of the participants noted that she understood tension to be part of the creative process and the interviews supported this view. Each of the principals spoke about tensions in their work and the ways in which they were seeking to embrace and use these tensions as catalysts for change. It may have been a crisis to inspire unity, a problem to inspire new solutions, or a divergent view to sharpen practice. Many of the participants expressed tensions or contradictions within their own leadership, whether it was overseeing business concerns rather than pedagogy, choosing to write rather than speak, or being patient when action was preferred. This embracing of opposites was articulated in the work of Frank Barron, a pioneer in the psychology of creativity, who began his writing in the 1960's. In a tribute to his life, Montuori (2003) speaks of Barron's work and the significance of the dialogue between oppositions in the creative process. He says: "Frank showed that creative individuals alternate order and disorder, simplicity and complexity, sanity and craziness in an ongoing process" (Montuori, 2003).

Linked to the importance of contradiction, the interviews also uncovered an apparent tension underlying the satisfaction and motivation of each of the participants. Each one of them recognised the complexity and enormity of the leadership role they were fulfilling. Stress, workload and sustainability were mentioned in some way by each of the participants. It may be expected that such a demanding role would impact the motivation levels of the person and lower their job satisfaction. Ironically it was clear from the interviews that the variety, complexities and challenges of the role were actually a motivating force for each

of the leaders. The ability to embrace this complexity and thrive on the challenges that it brings was very evident in the research. Caldwell refers to this as one of the “paradoxes of principalship” (Caldwell, 2006, p. 129). This paradox raises several questions. Are these educational leaders representative of their peers? Is creativity dependent upon the ability of the individual? Is there any correlation between their willingness to embrace complexity and their capacity to approach their leadership creatively? Acar and Runco (2012) suggest that organisational creativity depends upon the abilities of the individuals within it. Further research into the connection between creativity and capacity would be valuable.

Another legitimate area worthy of future research is the correlation between personal traits and creativity in leadership. Investigating the origins of creative thought and skill would help to uncover whether some leaders are naturally creative. This then raises the question as to whether it is their creativity, which may enable them to be effective leaders, or whether it is their effective leadership, which allows them to draw upon the traits of creativity. Are some leaders intuitively creative? Are some creative people intuitively good leaders? The causal and developmental links between creativity and leadership would be worthy of further research.

This study also raises the question of the suitability and effectiveness of training for creativity in leadership. Montuori states: “We could all aspire to and be educated for creativity”. (Montuori, 2003). Although many researchers in the field may agree with this (de Bono, 1992; Puccio et al., 2011) there is as yet no consensus on how to best do this. Mumford et al. state: “We simply do not know a

great deal about how we should go about developing people to lead creative efforts” (2007). De Bono’s lateral thinking, Puccio and Mance’s Creative Problem Solving (CPS) (Puccio et al.) are two well-known examples. Recent research by Barrett et al. (2013), however, suggests that training in problem solving skills may not be as useful as training in the applications of creative problem solving solutions. Their research found that thinking about the uses of ideas and the implementation of these ideas created stronger mental models and more original responses. Stoll and Temperley are optimistic about the potential for training in this area: “Our experience suggests that while some people are, instinctively, creative leaders, creative leadership can be enhanced” (Stoll & Temperley, 2009, p. 68). It is clear that further research and development into the training of educational leaders for creativity, and how that would best be facilitated, is required.

The last few years have seen scholars in the field calling for more research into creativity to better understand its characteristics and effects. It is recognised that the complex nature of creativity makes this research difficult. In the educational field this difficulty is compounded by the complexity of the school setting and the many and varied dimensions of the organisation. This study highlights the need for further research in several key areas. It would be helpful to quantify the significance of the principal in promoting, modelling and articulating creativity within the school and to measure the impact that this leadership role may have on executive staff, teachers and students. Following from this it would be useful to research the broader dynamics of creativity and the ways in which interactions

between stakeholders either supports or blocks the shaping of creativity within a school.

Final Thoughts

Imagination lies at the heart of all that is best in education.

(Caldwell, 2006, p.3)

To fully understand the essence of creativity in leadership it is important to return to the definition of creativity. I defined creativity as: “**a deliberate process of imagining and shaping. The creator (person) applies knowledge and skill (process) to bring diverse elements together to make a new construct (product) that is valuable and relevant to its environment (place)**” (See Chapter 3).

At the beginning of this thesis I proposed that the central challenge of educational leadership is the responsibility of imagining and shaping an educational community. It is incumbent upon the leader to craft the vision, put in place the structures, systems and processes that will support and promote the vision, oversee the outworking of that vision and continually review, revise and update it. The interviews have confirmed that this process is essentially a creative one. Each of the seven principals demonstrated the interplay between person, process, product, place and persuasion and the leadership skills and decisions they are making to accept, reject or synthesise the current paradigms. Their everyday experiences have displayed the essence of creativity in leadership.

The interviews demonstrated that in leadership there is no “silver bullet”, or one size fits all, and that situations, environments and different pressures and contingencies require educational leaders to be adaptive in their leadership style. The participants expressed the need to adapt to different circumstances and to strategically embrace varying styles of leadership to develop their communities. This calls into question propositions about the superiority of specific types of leadership, such as the debate about whether transformational or instructional leadership is the most useful leadership style. It is certainly worthy to assess and study differing leadership approaches, but promoting any style as the best way, or expecting uniform outcomes in varying contexts, is neither helpful nor realistic. In an entertaining quotation attributed to one of the early leaders in creativity research, Frank Barron, it was said that he was “less likely to throw out the baby with the bath water than to put another baby into the bath water and keep an eye on the whole scene” (Barron, 1996). A suite of well researched leadership styles and an understanding of their differing assumptions and impacts could be a useful tool to the current educational leader. This call to move away from the exclusivity of a “one size fits all” approach (Hallinger, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Mulford, 2008) and integrate aspects of many leadership approaches has gained momentum in the field.

My aim in this research has been to better understand the connections between change, leadership and creativity. The study illuminates the ways in which these three imperatives intertwine “like the strands of a rope” (Puccio et al., 2011, p.3). The interviews, and the conclusions drawn from them, show that a better understanding of the three strands will make for a stronger rope. The “Creativity in

Leadership Model” will give educational leaders a visual representation of the dynamic between change, leadership and creativity, which will add to the extant knowledge and may assist them in their practice. As the challenges and opportunities of change present themselves to our educational leaders, a capacity to maximise creativity in their leadership will enable more visionary and effective outcomes. This study has explored the connections, the tensions and the possibilities of this three-stranded rope.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet



University of Wollongong

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET FOR INDEPENDENT SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

TITLE: *A phenomenological study of creativity in the leadership of the independent school principal.*

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is an invitation to participate in a study conducted by researchers at the University of Wollongong. The purpose of the research is to investigate the importance of creativity to the leadership role of independent school principals. It will consider how the paradigms, the context and the principal each promote or hinder creativity in leadership. This will provide information to principals, policymakers and trainers in the design of research-informed training courses.

Student Researcher
Mrs Julie Reynolds
Faculty of Education
0403 090 020
5511

jreynolds@cedars.nsw.edu.au
llockyer@uow.edu.au

Supervisor
Associate Professor Narrotam Bhindi
Faculty of Education
02- 4221 5477

nbhindi@uow.edu.au

Supervisor
Professor Lori Lockyer
Faculty of Education
02-4221

METHOD AND DEMANDS ON PARTICIPANTS

If you choose to be included, you will be asked to participate in a one-hour interview with the researcher. This interview will be arranged at a time and place convenient to you. The interview will be audiotaped to allow for the transcribing of the information. Typical questions in the interview include: Can you articulate why you wanted to be a principal? How important is creativity in your role as a principal? What aspects of the role do you most value? How do you respond to problems? Are there features of your school environment, which stop you from being creative? After the interview you will be sent a transcript of a summary of the interview and asked to check that it reflects your perspectives correctly. This checking may take 20-30 minutes. If you have further questions or there are further details that need to be explored you will be invited for a follow up interview of one hour or less.

POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

Apart from the time required for the interview(s) we can foresee no risks for you. Your involvement in the study is voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time and withdraw any data that you have provided to that point. Refusal to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with the University of Wollongong. If you have any questions regarding this research you may contact the Student Researcher at any time.

FUNDING AND BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

This study is not externally funded. This research will raise the awareness of the concerns and insights of current independent school principals in regard to their leadership roles and their understanding of creativity. It may provide useful information for the training of prospective principals. Findings from the study will be published in a thesis and possibly published in educational journals. Confidentiality is assured, and the school, you and the students will not be identified in any part of the research.

ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the UoW Ethics Officer on (02) 4221 4457.

Thank you for your interest in this study.

Julie Reynolds
Student Researcher

Appendix 2: Consent Form



University of Wollongong

CONSENT FORM

Research: A phenomenological study of creativity in the leadership of the independent school principal

Researcher: Julie Reynolds

I have been given information about "*A phenomenological study of creativity in the leadership of the independent school principal*" and I have discussed the research project with Julie Reynolds who is conducting this research as part of a PHD Integrated supervised by Associate Professor Narrotam Bhindi and Professor Lori Lockyer in the Department of Education at the University of Wollongong.

I understand that there are no potential risks and burdens associated with this research and have had an opportunity to ask Julie Reynolds any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with the researcher or the University of Wollongong.

If I have any enquiries about the research, I can contact Julie Reynolds 0403 090 020 or Associate Professor Narrotam Bhindi (02) 4221 5477 or if I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office of Research, University of Wollongong on 4221 4457.

By signing below I am indicating my consent to

- be involved with one or two interviews of one hour in length at a time and place convenient to me
- to review a summary of any interviews held

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for the preparation of a thesis and possible journal publications or conference presentations, and I consent for it to be used in that manner.

Signed

Date

.....
Name (please print)

...../...../.....

.....

Appendix 3: Ethics Approval

University of Wollongong



INITIAL APPLICATION APPROVAL

In reply please quote: HE11/491
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 4457
GH:CJ

15 December 2011

Ms Julie Reynolds

Dear Ms Reynolds

I am pleased to advise that the Human Research Ethics application referred to below has been **approved**.

Ethics Number: HE11/491
Project Title: A phenomenological study to understand the importance of creativity in the leadership role of the independent school principal
Researchers: Ms Julie Reynolds, A/Professor Narrotam Bhindi, Professor Lori Lockyer
Approval Date: 15 December 2011
Expiry Date: 14 December 2012

The University of Wollongong/Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the *National Statement* and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/rso/ethics/UOW009385.html>. This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

Research Services Office University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia
Telephone: +61 2 4221 3386 Facsimile: +61 2 4221 4338
research-services@uow.edu.au www.uow.edu.au/research

Appendix 4: Background Research on Questions

Possible Questions using “Exploring creativity in leadership model”

Leadership		What do you most love about your school?
Accept		
Reject		What would you most like to change about your school?
Synthesise		Have you sought to accept or change the school environment? In what ways?
Places		Are there challenges that require creativity in your leadership with staff?
Social context		As a leader how do you engage with others – staff, parents, students?
Material context		Are there aspects of the physical environment that require problem solving? How well does your governance model support your leadership?
Political context		Are there systems or constraints that direct your leadership? Do you see any tension between creativity and compliance?
Person		What elements of your personality are most significant in your leadership role?
Personality		
Motivation		Can you articulate why you wanted to be principal? What do you most value about your role as a principal? Are there features of your work that discourage you? When is your motivation at its strongest? What are those things in your work that drive you on?
Confidence		What was it like for you when you first became a principal? Are there assumptions that underpin your leadership? What surprised you as a new leader of a school?
Wide interests		How would you describe your interests?
Openness	to	What did you see as a possibility when you came to the role of principal?
experience		Does your role afford you a sense of autonomy? Why or why not? In what ways are you able to be autonomously creative?
Autonomy		
Process		In your leadership role how have you identified problems?
Approach	to	How do you face problems or challenges?
problems		What do you experience when there are problems? How do you feel when things go wrong?
Flexibility		How significant is flexibility to you?
Divergent thinking		How would you describe your greatest obstacles?
Using knowledge		How do you problem solve?
and experience		What professional or theoretical background is most helpful for you in this role?
Product		How important is creativity in your role?
Creativity	in	How do you understand the idea of creativity?
leadership		In what ways is your experience of the role creative? What creative opportunities have you enjoyed?
General		Are there things which stop you from adopting a creative approach? Would you consider the role of the independent school principal requires creativity? Why or why not?

Continued over page

Background notes on ‘types’ of interview questions

Type of Question	Notes	Example
Funnelling	Where the interviewer controls the flow and type of information – may be to begin with general and broad and then to become more specific and personal	
Initiating questions	Used to begin the interview or introduce new topics	
Probing	Used to elicit more detail and to clarify	Can you explain that further?
Descriptive	Often used to start interviews Placing their own interpretation as they describe	Can you describe a time when you have used creativity in your leadership? Which aspects of your leadership are most creative in approach? What do you see when your staff are working creatively?
Story telling	Asking questions in a way that invites the informant to tell a story which parallels the social interaction of an ordinary conversation – it invites the informant to engage in a monologue in which they may generalise, classify, summarise, quantify or explain	Tell me the story of...
Background demographic	Age, sex, education, occupation etc	How long have you been principal? In how many schools have you been principal?
Structural	Questions which aim at finding out the informant organises their knowledge	Which areas of leadership have you been focusing upon?
Contrast	Invites them to make comparisons of situations and discuss the meanings	Do you respond differently to the creative tasks as opposed to the non-creative tasks?
Opinion/value	Aimed at gaining access to the cognitive and interpretive processes of people ie what they think about an experience	What is your opinion of creativity – or what do you think about creativity? Do you respond differently to the creative tasks as opposed to the non creative tasks?
Feeling	Understanding peoples emotional responses	How do you feel about creativity? What would that mean for you?
Knowledge	Find out what the informant considers to be factual	
Sensory	Asking about what has been seen, heard, touched, tasted and smelled	What do you see when your staff are working creatively?
Devil’s advocate	Deliberately confronts with argument of opponents to provoke the informant into elaborating	
Hypothetical	What if question – suggest a plausible scenario and ask the informant to guess at his or her own attitude or behaviour in response	
Non question		I wonder if there was anything you’d like to say about creativity?

Appendix 5: Sample Interview Script

Name of Participant:

Time and Date:

Consent Form: Circle Yes or No?

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the interview process for this research. I appreciate your time and value the insights that this discussion will uncover. I also hope that the process of reflecting might be useful to you in some way.

As you know I am looking at creativity in leadership.

As it is a phenomenological study my focus is very much on the personal experience of my participants. As we talk I invite you to share practical examples of your experience, how it looks, sounds and feels to you in real life. Your own observations about the experiences you have had will be really important to me. I am not looking to discuss theories of creativity but rather exploring your experience and understanding.

I will be recording the interview and will use this digital recording to make a transcript of our discussion. Any recording or notes will remain in confidence and no names or identifying features will be published. I expect the interview will take between 30 mins to one hour in length.

Please don't hesitate to take time to think as you talk - any pauses or slower sections will just help my transcribing. As the interviewer I will try to say very little and let the focus be on your ideas and your reflections as they unfold.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

INTERVIEW

We will begin with a few background questions

CONCLUSION

Is there anything else you would like to add before I leave?

*Thank you for participating in this interview.
I will type up the information from this interview and send it to you for your checking. Would you prefer that I mail this transcript to you confidentially or is there a preferred email address that you would like me to send it to you?*

As I work on the data I may approach a few of the respondents with a request for a follow up interview later on in the year. I will contact you if that is needed. Again your involvement in a second interview would be completely voluntary. Thank you so much for your time today and for your willingness to help me in the research.

Thanks and gift.

Continued Over page

Topic	Notes
(Leadership) First some really quick questions: How long have you been principal at this school? How long have you been a principal? How many schools have you been principal at? Roughly how many students are at this school? What is it like to be principal of school x? When you first got here were there things you wanted to make happen, or change or leave as they were?	
(Creativity – definition) What does leadership feel like to you? What does creativity feel like to you? Are there words or phrases that you associate with leadership? Are there words or phrases that you associate with creativity? Is the idea of creativity ever on your radar? If so when or how?	
(Places) What are the most difficult things about your role? What are the best things about your role? Are there elements of your role as principal which allow you to make things happen or bring things to life? Can you describe one or two? Has there ever been a time when you felt unable to make things happen in your role as principal? Can you describe a time when you really felt a sense of freedom in your leadership? Alternatively can you describe a time when you felt a restriction on your freedom as a leader?	
(Person) I am wondering what drives you in this role? What brings you joy in the role? Are there any strong beliefs that underpin your leadership? What elements of your role energise you the most? What elements of your role drain you the most?	
(Process) All schools have their own set of problems – can you describe a time when you faced a serious problem and how you approached it? How do you feel when there are obstacles in the way of your leadership? How do you go about solving a problem? What professional experiences have helped you to approach problems creatively? Can you make any comment about risk taking in relation to your role?	
(Product) Can you think of a time when you have seen creativity at play in your school context? In your experience – do you see creativity linking with leadership in any ways?	
Conclusion Is there anything else you would like to add before I leave?	

Appendix 6: Transcription Protocols

Sample Transcript Cover Page

Participant: Participant = Principal 2
Male Principal
X years experience at School C
X years experience as a Principal

Date: X June 2012

Time: 2pm – 3pm

Total interview time: 54 mins

Place: Principal's office

School: School C

Descriptor: Independent Co-ed Metropolitan school
Prep – Year 12
Enrolment: X

Transcription Notes:

- Note – the full transcript is used for confidential analysis and will not be printed as it appears here in the thesis. Any sections of text with background material that may identify a specific school will not be quoted directly in the thesis.
- Small sections/comments may be quoted in the thesis as appropriate.
- The participant will only be identified by the generic information printed above.
- Names of specific schools or people are denoted by letters or numbers to preserve anonymity.
- Replacement terms inserted to avoid identification are placed in parenthesis.
- Short pauses or informal thinking cues e.g. 'um', 'ah', 'sort of' etc. are denoted by ellipses.
- Words said with stress are printed in bold.
- Sound cues e.g. laughter, phone ringing are written in italics and placed in parenthesis

Appendix 7: Sample summary notes from interview

Name Key Quotation “Back to the work shed”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school with some serious historical pressures now facing many challenges regarding enrolments and budgets • First principalship 5 years in the role • Pressures making the leadership journey very challenging • Struggling context, financially insecure, community unstable needing change • Creatively rejecting and synthesizing current paradigm 		
Place	Person	Process	Product
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to rebuild after ill considered change • Tension between providing consistency and delivering improvement • Communicating with parents a challenge • Cultural barrier – parents not valuing education • Wanting growth, community and valuable educational experience on a ‘ridiculously low budget’ • Need for zero cost solutions • Lack of competence in leadership staff • ‘momentary crisis’ have caused damage and taken up time • complex problems – emotional, legal, industrial, relational • constantly fighting small fires – both demands creativity and hampers creativity • big picture vision vs small picture budget • cant take eye off: efficiencies and growth • Budget • School history a difficult one • Cultural context in need of change and improvement • Concern with performance metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energised by change management • Mathematical and a scientific background – thought creativity was for arts • Logical – came to see that policy writing still creative • Saw creativity as making something out of nothing but now sees creativity as gathering components together to achieve something – it’s the way you put things together • Cant stand seeing things done badly • Loves developing the backbone for change and coming up with ideas • Sees teamwork as important but unsure of team • Fear and risk aversion demonstrated in crisis • Had no training in problem solving • Wishing he had latitude in how he spends his time – wanting to be in classrooms and focus on educational change • Wanted to delegate but sees incompetency • Unsure in some responses • Concerned with process and compliance • Practical approach • Concern with control and competency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back to the work shed to make things eg programs, infrastructure, professional development • Business pressures squeeze out educational focus • Turning ideas into reality is creative and satisfying • Need to align vision and practice for sustainability • Has seen creativity at every level demonstrated in industry – inviting ideas he was asked if he does that as a leader and the conversation moved to compliance rather than creativity • Giving latitude to teachers in classroom but not in other places • Timetable creative • Budget constraints were a key theme • Able to review problem solving – some success some not successful • Wary of relational approach • Concern with risk to school • Expressed concern with constraints in seeking help for problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertain about long term future of the school causing difficulties for leadership • Was unsure about link with creativity • Saw it as bringing different elements together • Demonstrated an interest in creative approaches to process and policy but expressed frustration with current constraints

