Vision, relationships and teacher motivation: a case study

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Abstract *School leaders continue to be urged to have vision. Some argue that effective schools have principals who create and communicate a vision for the school. However, although there is literature on visionary leadership, relatively little is empirical. The purpose of the study was to investigate transformational leadership behaviour and vision in schools. Four schools, in which the transformational leadership practices of principals were perceived by teachers to be characterised by individual concern and vision, were identified. A qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews was used to collect data. Content analysis identified patterns and themes in the data from which propositions and conclusions were drawn. Within the context of the study, the results suggest that the influence of vision may be overestimated and the most critical leadership transformational behaviour is individual concern. The main conclusion of the study is that leadership in schools is mainly characterised by relationships with individuals, and it is through these relationships a leader is able to establish her/his leadership and encourage teachers to apply their expertise, abilities, and efforts towards shared purposes.*

Introduction
Schools today want leaders who have vision. Increasingly, vision is seen as a core leadership task that must be mastered by all leaders (Lashway, 2000). Generally, the literature on charismatic and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Conger and Kanungo, 1987; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999) has argued that vision is important for building commitment and motivating followers, groups or organisations. Further, research in the school setting (Blumberg and Greenfield, 1986; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1997, 2000; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999; Sashkin and Walberg, 1993; Vandenberghe and Staessens, 1991) has consistently supported the notion that effective schools must have leaders who create and articulate a vision for the school. In addition, more recently, they have argued that vision is a component of transformational leadership that encourages high levels of commitment and motivation by individuals and organisations to solving the problems associated with the challenges of restructuring.

Theoretical background
"Vision refers to an idealised goal that the leader wants the organisation to achieve in the future" (Conger and Kanungo, 1987, p. 640). Vision is perceived

to be a primary source of charisma, a central concept in most transformational leadership models (Bass, 1985; Bass and Avolio, 1997; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000). Indeed, an idealised vision is considered to be a prerequisite to become transformational. Once created, this vision must be articulated to mobilise individuals to pursue it (Awamleh and Gardiner, 1999).

Transformational leadership theory

James McGregor Burns (1978) first conceptualised two forms of leadership, transformational and transactional. Transformational leaders raise followers' consciousness levels about the importance and value of designated outcomes and ways of achieving them. They also motivate followers to transcend their own immediate self interest for the sake of the mission or vision of the organisation. Transactional leadership is based on an exchange relationship in which follower compliance (effort, productivity, loyalty) is exchanged for expected rewards (Burns, 1978).

Bass (1985) built on the ideas of Burns (1978) and developed a model and measuring instrument, which places transformational, transactional and *laissez-faire* leadership on a continuum. Bass's most recent model (Bass and Avolio, 1997) proposed that four distinct behavioural constructs identified transformational leadership. The most important transformational constructs are idealised influence and inspirational motivation, which according to Bass and Avolio (1997) are the behavioural components of charisma, the key quality of a transformational leader. Idealised influence – charisma – occurs when leaders are role models and are respected and admired by followers. This includes behaviours such as expressing values and beliefs, emphasising mission, embracing high morality and avoiding use of power for personal gain (Awamleh and Gardiner, 1999).

Inspirational motivation occurs when leaders motivate and inspire followers by providing meaning and challenge to their work; for example, giving inspirational talks, communicating vision and acting in ways that encourage enthusiasm (Awamleh and Gardiner, 1999). The third transformational construct is intellectual stimulation, where leaders encourage followers to think creatively and approach situations in different ways. The fourth construct is individualised consideration, where leaders consider each individual's needs and assist her or his development.

Three behavioural constructs identified transactional leadership. The first is contingent reward, where interaction between leaders and followers involves an exchange. The second is management by exception (active), where leaders monitor to make sure mistakes are not made. The third is management by exception (passive), where leaders only intervene when "things go wrong". A non-leadership construct, *laissez-faire* leadership, which reflects the absence of leadership and intervention, is also included in the model.

Purpose of the study

The concept of charisma is central to most transformational leadership models (Bass and Avolio, 1997; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999). One of the primary sources of charisma is the development and articulation of a compelling vision that inspires and motivates followers to higher levels of commitment and performance (Bryman, 1992). Indeed, "the creation of vision is often viewed as the starting point for leader efforts to transform followers, groups and organisations" (Awamleh and Gardner, 1999, p. 314).

Nevertheless, not all leadership researchers and practitioners share this same optimism about vision. For example, Conger (1989) found that negative outcomes for the leader and the organisation often occurred around vision. Vision was a problem when the leader made exaggerated claims about the vision or when the resources necessary for its accomplishment were underestimated. In addition, visions were problematic when they failed to reflect the needs and values of the organisation and changes in context that required a re-assessment of vision (Conger, 1999). Conley (1996) found that many school leaders had become ambivalent and even cynical about the usefulness of vision (Lashway, 1997).

Further, Licata and Harper (2001) argued that evidence in the school setting (Keener, 1995; Lonnquist and King, 1993; Louis and Miles, 1990) suggested that leadership and the involvement of teachers in the development of school vision do not guarantee that these individuals will internalise the aims and act to make it a reality. In addition, other empirical evidence in the school setting (Barnett *et al.*, 2001) has suggested that the positive effects of vision may be overestimated. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate more carefully the transformational leadership behaviour, vision, in schools.

Conceptual framework

The research purpose and the view shared by a number of researchers (Conger, 1989; Holladay and Coombs, 1993; Tichy and Devanna, 1986) that visionary leadership behaviour is composed of two stages, the creation of vision and the communication of vision to followers and others, provided the basis for development of a conceptual framework (see Figure 1). Figure 1 shows that the research purpose and this two-stage view of visionary leadership behaviour were used to develop a number of research questions. Thus, three research questions related to the creation of vision, "What is understood by school vision?", "What are the foci of school visions?" and "How is school vision developed?" were developed and three research questions were developed that related to the communication of vision, "How is commitment to school vision developed?", "What are the expectations of principals for teachers in schools?" and "What influence does vision have in schools?" The research questions guided the research design, a qualitative case study and determined that principals and teachers in schools where principals were perceived to practice
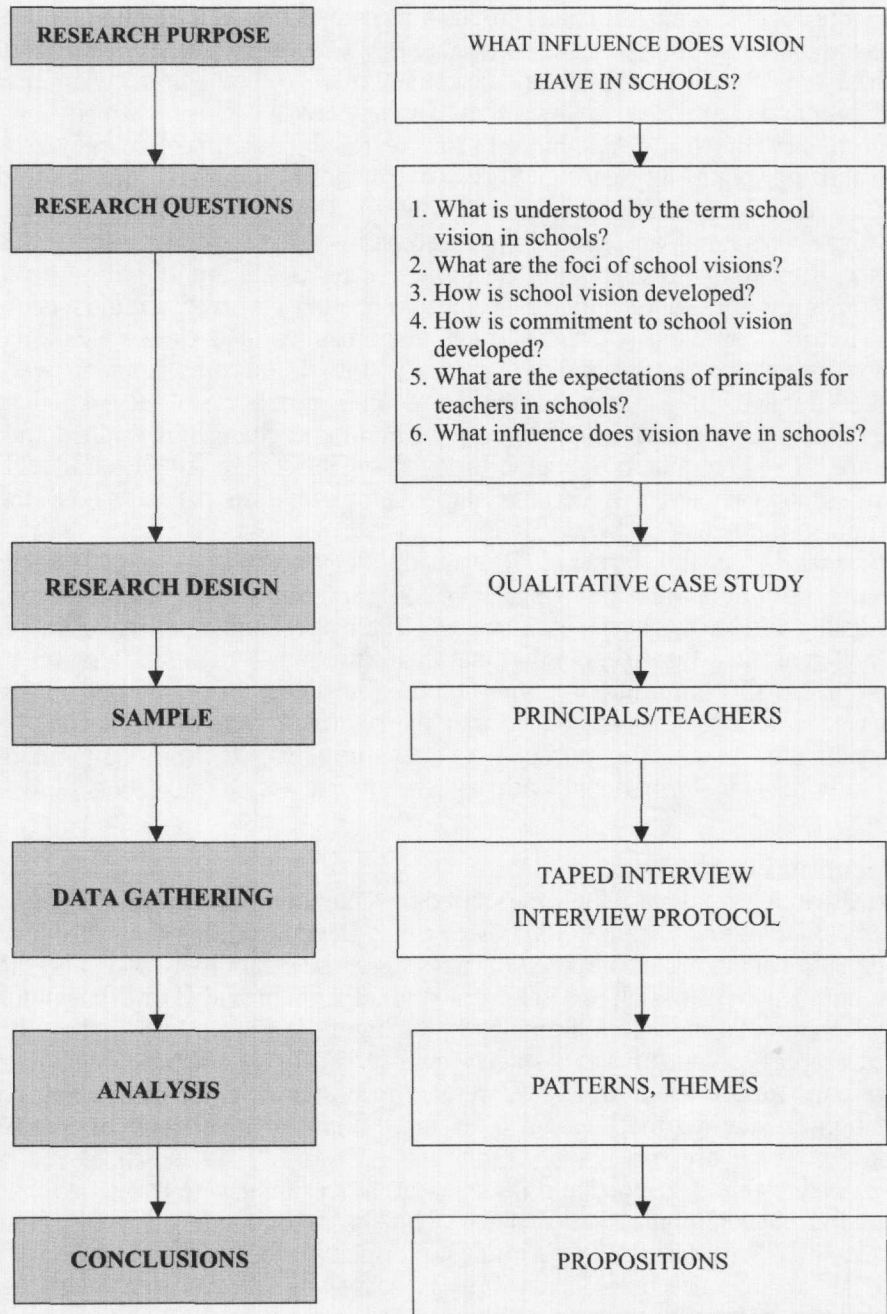
RESEARCH PURPOSE	WHAT INFLUENCE DOES VISION HAVE IN SCHOOLS?
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	1. What is understood by the term school vision in schools? 2. What are the foci of school visions? 3. How is school vision developed? 4. How is commitment to school vision developed? 5. What are the expectations of principals for teachers in schools? 6. What influence does vision have in schools?
RESEARCH DESIGN	QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY
SAMPLE	PRINCIPALS/TEACHERS
DATA GATHERING	TAPED INTERVIEW INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
ANALYSIS	PATTERNS, THEMES
CONCLUSIONS	PROPOSITIONS

Figure 1.
Conceptual framework

transformational leadership behaviours would be sampled (see Figure 1). The research questions also determined the data gathering methods, which were individual face to face taped interviews, and led to the development of an interview protocol with open ended questions for data collection as shown in Figure 1. The data were transcribed from the taped interviews and were analysed using content analysis to identify the patterns and themes from which propositions were generated and conclusions made (see Figure 1).

Method
Sample selection
Four government high schools in New South Wales, Australia were identified, in a previous study, in which the transformational leadership practices of principals were perceived by teachers to be characterised by individual concern and vision. Four principals and 11 randomly selected classroom teachers from the four schools were interviewed; three teachers from each of three of the schools and two from one school. Despite repeated attempts to meet with the third teacher from the latter school, time constraints made this interview impractical.

Data gathering
Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face with individual principals and teachers. An interview protocol encouraged informants to talk freely and openly about what they perceived to be significant. It also allowed for comparison between responses and ensured that issues considered to be crucial to the research were not neglected. The interview questions and the order in which they were organised, therefore, were designed to provide a common agenda for discussions between informants and the researcher.

Principals were asked to respond to 26 questions and teachers were asked to respond to 16 questions concerning aspects of school leadership. Each of the questions was accompanied by suggested prompts which could be used to obtain further details and invite the informant to elaborate or seek clarification (Patton, 1990). The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in duration for principals and 40 minutes for teachers, and were recorded on audiotape.

Data analysis
Qualitative fieldwork in the four schools inevitably yielded a large amount of data, which was arranged into segments of material based on an organising system derived from the issues raised in the interviews. The analysis of data was deferred until the end of data collection and this meant that the interviews were transcribed and placed into transcript files. Careful reading of transcribed interview texts revealed that it was possible to identify patterns or categories in responses. It was clear that these categories could be separated into key

concepts or themes that were cut and pasted onto cards. This process was explained to another researcher who independently read the transcripts and analysed the data using the same process. The two researchers discussed the tentative themes that seemed to be emerging from the data. This resulted in approximately 90 per cent agreement between the two researchers with regard to emergent themes in the data. Questionable themes were discussed and debated between the researchers. As a result of these discussions the principal researcher made decisions about the themes that were emerging in the data. Thus, this process was not carried out in isolation, but independently checked.

The process was essentially one of cross-case analysis (Patton, 1990), one outcome of which was a two dimensional matrix based on the card index system with categories and themes related to leadership on one axis and the different sources of data, that is, principals and teachers on the other axis. The development of a two dimensional matrix made it possible to compare and contrast what principals and teachers had to say about leadership in schools.

It was evident from the data that each theme was made up of phrases that identified it. Thus, the next step in the analysis was to identify the phrases that characterised different themes. A further step involved placing phrases into theme typologies that consisted of responses in which certain words were used in a certain context, and what linked these responses was the use of specific language and patterns in responses related to a theme. This type of analysis is complex because some informants said one thing and others contradicted them, and it was important to understand this contradiction in the interpretation of the data. In moving the analysis to the level of typology it was thought that patterns in responses and specific language could be identified. Each typology was examined and then propositions were generated. The propositions were placed across all identified themes and typologies to see whether there were more complex aspects and associations that needed to be included. Once it was concluded that there was nothing more to be found in the data, the themes, typologies and propositions were interpreted.

Results and discussion
Background of schools
During the teacher and principal interviews it was possible to ascertain some background details concerning the four schools.

School A was a city school with approximately 800 students. The principal had been in that position at the school for approximately eight years. The school was facing major change and the principal and many of the staff mentioned that this anticipated change was having an unsettling influence on the school.

School B was a city school with approximately 1,000 students. The principal had been at the school for approximately three years. According to the current principal, the previous principal had been a visionary leader and had

implemented major changes in the school. The school was currently renewing its vision with major projects instigated by the current principal.

School C was a school on the outskirts of the city with approximately 700 students. The principal had been at the school for two and a half years. The school had a poor reputation in the community and the principal and teachers were working towards raising standards and the development of a shared school vision.

School D was a rural school with approximately 1,000 students. The principal had been in that position at the school for approximately six years. According to the principal, past principals had been visionary and the current principal continued to foster vision. The principal and the teachers both mentioned a recent industrial dispute as having an impact on the school.

What is understood by the term school vision in schools?
School vision was perceived by principals and teachers to be the future direction that the school community had agreed to pursue. Vision was seen to provide the school community with a sense of purpose and a picture of the future. Vision was collective in the sense that the school community had developed it together. It was not seen to be rhetoric but to involve action, suggesting that little value was placed on a school vision that was not also practical. Further, vision was seen to be a stimulus for change.

What are the foci of school visions?
Principals and teachers said that vision was about being focused on individual student needs and the improvement of teaching and learning. Principals and teachers used terms such as "identify individual needs" and "meet the learning style of students" which reflected such a focus. Both groups used words such as "improve teaching", "develop learning" and "lot of professional development" to describe the emphasis on teaching and learning that was part of vision as illustrated by the following responses:

> ... the vision describes us as a learning community, it links students, teachers, administrators and parents. Our goal is to improve teaching practice and shared decision making with the bottom line being, impact on student outcomes... we see ourselves as lifelong learners and we work together to learn and find better ways to learn ... and we are trying to improve (Principal A).

> We have a lot of professional development on lesson planning ... how to take the students from rote learning to where they can do things without thinking about it ... we are trying to put more effort into lesson planning ... we are trying to lift our standards (Teacher F).

The visions expressed by these principals were of their schools providing the best education for students in a changing environment. Their responses also suggested that they had an appreciation for change, but this did not limit their commitment to working towards achieving the purposes expressed in vision as illustrated by the following comment:

We are about equipping students for an appreciation of lifelong learning because we understand that things change, having respect for yourself and others, because we want the learning to take place in an environment which is supportive and non-threatening and, to be socially responsible and also, to have enough confidence to project yourself into future roles (Principal B).

Further, these principals recognised the importance of building relationships with teachers, students and parents in fostering the commitment of these groups to school vision as suggested by Principal D:

I would see relationships with students as paramount. Basically relationships are how the school has been built, relationships are genuine and positive between teachers and teachers and teachers and students and it is improving between teachers and parents and that's part of the overarching philosophy that I see emanating throughout the school.

The importance of relationship-centred leadership was identified by Barnett *et al.* (2001) and is also consistent with recent research on school leaders in England (Day *et al.*, 2000).

How is school vision developed?
The development of school vision involved staff and executive meetings, surveys, committees, workshops, professional reading and reflection. The processes that were used to develop school vision have three interesting characteristics. The first is that these processes encouraged collaboration. The initiation of processes that were collaborative suggested recognition that school purposes and the professional purposes of teachers need to be the same. Otherwise, there is likely to be little chance of realising the school's vision.

The second characteristic is the major role played by the principal in the initiation of these processes. This is illustrated by the following descriptions of vision development:

We had a staff meeting and told them we were going to develop one (vision) together ... we (the deputy and principal) visited schools where we knew best practice was occurring and we did a fairly extensive literature search on effective schools and leadership selecting five outstanding pieces of writing and told them we would read one each week ... that worked fairly well ... we then ran workshops after school ... (we pulled the executive out) and they (teachers) did a series of questions and answers based on best teaching practice and the executive spent a whole day processing the data that had come from teachers ... from that we developed the vision statement (Principal A).

When I first came to the school, the principal and deputy were new ... they both had visions for the school. They held a whole weekend and sat down with teachers and said where do you want to go in this school and got everyone involved (Teacher F).

It seems these principals invested large amounts of time and effort in order to encourage collaboration within the school community in the development of school vision. This is consistent with research reported by Day *et al.* (2000). It should be emphasised that these principals recognised that leadership was not about imposing their own vision on a school community. Recent evidence (Blase and Blase, 1997; Stolp and Smith, 1995) has suggested that teachers are

more likely to support a school vision when it is the result of an authentic exchange of views among principals, teachers and others (Licata and Harper, 2001).

The third characteristic was that the development of school vision involved a lengthy, collaborative process. This suggested that these principals recognised the need to involve those who must implement and live with the results of vision through collaboration, the opportunity to develop vision and thus gain a sense of ownership. Without this shared sense of creation and shared responsibility, excellence is unlikely. Paradoxically, leadership is more essential, not less, when collaboration is encouraged (Kouzes and Posner, 1995).

In addition, the processes described by principals reflected the values of the school community that suggested each individual in the school community was valued and her/his opinions were considered in decision making as reflected in the following:

> All our decision making is by consensus … it's messy … it's a philosophy in our school that everyone's thoughts should be taken into account and it's a belief in ourselves that together we do things (Principal D).

How is commitment to school vision developed?
According to these principals and teachers, commitment to school vision was built through communication and when there was consistency between the leadership behaviour of the principal and school vision.

The communication of vision by these principals meant that it was continually revisited whenever opportunities arose, as suggested by the following responses:

> We have staff meetings … the P&C meeting and any sort of public meeting I use to get across my expectations (Principal C).

> It keeps coming up at teams meetings those vision statements keep coming up as the flavour … there will always be something there relating to the (vision) so you can't avoid them (Teacher A).

Consistency of leadership behaviours with vision provides evidence that a school principal can be trusted and, hence, may build commitment and consensus for vision. According to McShane and Von Glinow (2000), leadership behaviours that demonstrate this type of persistence and consistency build up an image of leadership that is trustworthy, honest and moral. Acting consistently suggests to followers that a leader is credible and competent in the capacities needed to move towards the school vision and make it a reality. In a sense, consistency of leadership with school vision establishes a principal's legitimacy to influence and introduce new ideas that may assist the school community in accomplishing its goals (Chemers, 2001).

These principals were perceived to be acting consistently with school vision when they demonstrated individual concern, used recognition and reward,

shared power and responsibility, used the school's vision as the basis for decision making and involved teachers, parents and students in processes designed to make school vision real.

Leadership, which was relationship oriented, was central to developing commitment and consensus among the school community. This result is not surprising as an earlier study (Barnett *et al.*, 2000) suggested that leadership in schools is mainly characterised by a relationship between the leader and individual followers. Thus, a school principal who showed individual concern was able to obtain the commitment and support of individual members of the school community because they knew her or him. Leadership behaviours that were perceived to show individual concern included being accessible, showing interest, providing support, being fair and providing rewards and recognition. It was Teacher J's view that:

> You can approach the principal anywhere, anytime about anything. The principal will be more than happy to do that, the principal is exceptionally interested in the welfare of every individual staff member and knows them from cleaning staff to office staff.

Recognition and reward were used to clarify school vision, to encourage individuals in the school community and to communicate to them that their efforts to make vision a reality were valued, as suggested by Teacher G:

> He will talk about it at morning tea and he will support people and congratulate them when they achieve and the executive staff will also add their congratulations so I think they are reinforcing the notion.

Sharing power and responsibility with others ensures that there is consistency in leadership at different levels within the school. For example, Teacher J said:

> In terms of delegating authority, whereas other principals may keep some responsibilities for themselves or the deputy ... our principal is quite happy to have volunteers from the staff to work on various areas of responsibility ... if there is a coordinator's role in the school, that would be advertised on the notice board, maybe 5-6 people would apply, they would all be interviewed, and if they missed out they would be told the reason.

Tannenbaum (1968 cited in Sergiovanni, 2000) has suggested that it is not so much strong leadership from the principal, but the total amount of leadership exercised in a school that counts. According to Sergiovanni (2000) leadership density is an under-valued and under-used contributor to school effectiveness.

What are the expectations of principals for teachers in schools?
These principals had high expectations of students and teachers and encouraged excellence in teaching and learning. They had a commitment to professionalism, a belief that all students could and should be given the opportunity to reach their potential and a commitment to improvement in teaching and learning. However, it was the actions of the principal which communicated these expectations including the provision of support through opportunities for collaboration, professional development, policies and

structures that enabled the school community to achieve excellence. In the opinion of Teacher K:

> The principal is a team player, our vision is to encourage student development but the principal does it for us as teachers, the principal listens, knows our strengths, if there is weakness the principal will provide support . . . the principal is a fantastic leader . . . knows the staff and is an educator and guide but we work together.

According to Licata and Harper (2001) teachers are more likely to be genuinely involved with implementation of a school's vision when they observe their principal and colleagues putting into place new structures and using them successfully to bring about a desired future. This is also consistent with Leithwood and Jantzi (1997).

What influence does vision have in schools?
The responses to this question were somewhat perplexing and, on the surface, contradictory. School vision was seen to be important by these principals and teachers. These principals described school vision as the "glue" that held the school together, while most teachers described school vision as having a "positive" effect on a school. For example:

> I actually think it is really important . . . it's something that makes teachers have an ethos and if there are enough teachers sharing it and believing it, it makes for a healthy environment, I guess it's really important it's what keeps the school going if you look at the down side you would go home and it obviously must be a shared vision . . . that's what makes you stay there . . . if things are going bad that's what sees you through (Teacher E).

It was evident from the earlier responses of teachers that they had been involved in collaborative processes to develop a shared school vision. However, many of these teachers suggested that vision did not influence teaching practices or cause them to question teaching practices as suggested by Teacher C:

> I know it's there (the vision) but it doesn't influence me when I am teaching.

The responses of teachers provided several possible explanations. First, individual vision had been translated into a shared sense of purpose in the school's vision. Hence, for some teachers they were already implementing the school's vision in the classroom as exemplified by Teacher H, whose view was:

> The vision doesn't really affect me because I want my students to work to the best of their ability no matter what anyway.

Second, some teachers suggested that operating in "survival" mode, prevented them from contemplating big picture issues like whether school vision is reflected in teaching practice as suggested by Teacher G:

> There is a girl on my staff and I think probably, if she can have, two out of five lessons each day, which are productive, then she is very happy because she knows that, especially with one class, it is just going to be a dog fight.

Third, most of these teachers focused on students, what they were learning and how they could encourage students to learn. For example:

> I don't think I've got this vision in my head and I'm standing there thinking am I achieving that. I keep thinking back to the students, what is interesting them, the vision isn't there for me to use, it's subconscious (Teacher B).

Finally, these teachers did not seem to make links between school vision, school structures, policy and classroom teaching practice. Teachers were able to describe structures and policies in the school that reflected school vision and how these had changed teaching practices, yet did not think that school vision had an influence in the classroom as the views of Teacher A suggested:

> We have longer periods that has changed the way people teach and act in the classroom. If you have 75 minutes you have got to do different activities.

> We don't worry about the school vision, it is produced for others ... I don't run my classroom different to what I have done at any other time.

A number of researchers (Elmore *et al.*, 1996; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Griffin, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989) have reported similar findings and have suggested several different explanations of why teachers do not question their practices. For example, Griffin (1995) suggested this was partly because the professional norm was "live and let live". More recently, Bess and Goldman (2001, p. 421) suggested that "teachers enjoy the protections of a tenure system that provides job security and a buffer that allows them to resist many requests from administrators". However, Elmore *et al.* (1996) suggested that teaching habits are complex and deeply rooted, and are not likely to be changed by school vision. Teachers find it extraordinarily difficult to attain the deep, systematic knowledge of practice needed to make vision a reality. Moreover, they do not automatically see the connection between school vision and its implications for teaching (Elmore *et al.*, 1996). In addition, some other researchers (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Rosenholtz, 1989) have suggested that the isolated professional cultures common in schools act as obstacles for teachers to engage in collaborative professional activities designed to encourage "practical thinking", identified by Leithwood *et al.* (1999) as necessary for change in teaching practices.

Characteristics of leadership in schools
A number of leadership characteristics became evident as the study progressed. First, there were differences in terms of the progress schools had made towards the development of a shared vision. This suggested that school contexts were different and context may limit a principal's ability to take the initiative in developing a shared school vision and build personal relationships. This, in turn, may influence perceptions of leadership. For example, School A and School D had developed a school vision and had established a culture to support it. School B was undergoing a renewal of its school vision and was

involved in discussions that examined many of the issues raised in the interviews. School C was beginning to develop a school vision and did not yet have a school culture that was supportive of it. In terms of school context, it was evident in School C that past events were particularly influential in the response of teachers to the principal's leadership. This is illustrated by the comments below:

> He would like to think that he has all on board (staff support) but there are people going the other way because he is not using the right processes to get their support and move them with him ... they say they have seen it all before and it never worked (Teacher D).

> The staff on the whole were disillusioned and were looking for someone new to come and do something, but at the same time a lot of them were burnt out, so I have tried to present a lot of ideas to them, even if their reaction is a bit cool ... we have not got a vision statement written down, but we have spent time developing values and beliefs (Principal C).

Conger (1999) has suggested that the leader and the context influence each other and that the degree of this influence is dependent on the situation. He argued that contextual variables can be thought of in terms of an outer, environment beyond the organisation and an inner, organisational context, including culture, structure and power distribution. Several studies (Conger, 1989; Roberts and Bradley, 1988) have suggested that some situations are more receptive to transformational leadership.

Second, these principals displayed leadership behaviours that were transformational in the sense that they "raised (followers) to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p. 426). Further, they were concerned with exploring conventional relationships and organisational understandings through involvement and participation, characteristics described by Burns (1978) as transformational leadership. However, the data suggested a complexity of leadership that is not captured in some models of transformational leadership, for example, that of Bass and Avolio (1997). Not included in the Bass and Avolio (1997) model and evident in this study are important behaviours such as building relationships and sharing of power and responsibility.

Further, these principals described leadership behaviours that included transactional leadership practices, such as ensuring that policies, teaching programs and teaching practices were meeting external requirements. For example, Principal B said:

> The deputy, myself and the leading teacher spend time with head teachers and we do like an audit ...and we do this several times a year.

This is consistent with other research (Eden, 1998) that has suggested transformational leadership is effective when it incorporates transactional leadership practices that are sensitive to teachers and accepted by them. Indeed, Leithwood and Jantzi (1997, p.314) argued that these types of

management practices are required in schools because "the right things need to be done and they need to be done right".

Finally, these principals demonstrated a relationship-oriented approach to leadership. This finding is consistent with Bolman and Deal (1997) who suggested that school principals tend to read and respond to day-to-day challenges from a human resource frame. However, the approach to leadership was more than showing a general well meaning consideration of members of the school community. These principals fostered genuine relationships with individuals in the school community and it was through these relationships that they established and expressed their leadership, as the comments below suggested:

> Basically relationships are how the school has been built long before I came on the scene, the relationships are genuine and fairly positive (Principal D).

> I have spent a lot of time and have a lot of fun building relationships because I really like people and working with them, but that to me is the essence of what this is all about building up that sense that we as a team can go anywhere (Principal B).

In addition, these principals were able to provide support and encouragement or direction that was unique to each individual's needs and development because they knew each person. In Teacher K's opinion:

> The principal is a team player, our vision is to encourage student development but the principal does it for us as teachers, the principal listens, knows our strengths, if there is weakness, the principal will provide support ... the principal is a fantastic leader ... knows the staff and is an educator and guide, but we work together.

Limitations of the study
The main limitation of the study is the small sample. Clearly four schools, four principals and 11 teachers provide a range of insights into leadership behaviours, but limit generalisation. These findings should be validated with another larger sample of schools, principals and teachers.

Conclusions
Despite the limitations of the study, there are a number of conclusions about these schools that can be drawn. First, vision was an important transformational leadership behaviour that provided direction and purpose. Vision included leadership practices such as, building a shared vision, developing consensus and commitment for vision and expression of high expectations. It seems that building a shared vision involved the initiation of collaborative processes within the school community to develop a shared vision. This helped to bind people together and establish group ownership of school vision. Consensus and commitment to school vision were developed through leadership practices such as communication, leader credibility and the involvement of the school community in collaborative processes. Similarly,

high expectations were expressed through leadership practices, including communication, consistency of leader actions, distributed leadership and provision of structures and resource support to achieve excellence.

Second, most models of transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio, 1997; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999) assume that it is the leader who articulates a vision that motivates and inspires followers to sacrifice their own interests for the sake of the organisation. Vision is no doubt an important part of leadership, but evidence from this study suggests that it must reflect the needs, interests, values and beliefs of the school community (Sergiovanni, 1990). Simply, developing a vision may not be enough to motivate followers to higher levels of effort and performance. Vision needs to be grounded in some level of practicality otherwise followers may view it as unrealistic or wishful thinking (Berson *et al.*, 2001). Indeed, other research (Pawar and Eastman, 1997) has shown that vision is likely to be more or less appealing depending on the extent to which it appears to be relevant to a particular context. Further, the inspirational strength of a vision appears to depend partly on the degree to which it reflects the interests and characteristics of an organisation and its employees (Pawar and Eastman, 1997).

Third, vision by itself was not enough to influence what most teachers actually did however, vision gets the most attention in the literature. Meindl (1990) suggested that people tend to exaggerate the effects of leadership because they have implicit theories about organisations, to which they attribute the powerful effects of leadership. People tend to inflate the importance of leadership in explaining organisational events because of attribution errors, stereotyping and the need for situational control (Ayman, 1993; Lord and Hall, 1995; Salancik and Meindl, 1984). Meindl (1990) contended that the heroic descriptions of leaders in transformational leadership theory are consistent with these romantic distortions. Furthermore, Meindl (1990) asserted that follower motivation and inspiration might occur independently of a leader.

That vision, in these schools, appeared to have little influence on changes in teaching and learning practices suggests the possibility that its effect may be overestimated. It is acknowledged that this result needs to be interpreted cautiously. However, three of the schools in this study had engaged in collaborative processes leading to the development of shared vision, but this had not resulted in teachers questioning teaching and learning practices. This is consistent with previous studies, for example, Barnett *et al.* (2001) and Stevenson (2001).

It is apparent that practising principals need to have a thorough understanding of vision and its role in schools. Principals should ensure that vision is relevant to context. They should not overestimate the effect of school vision or underestimate the resources required for its accomplishment. In

addition, principals need to be aware that vision by itself may not be enough to actually influence what teachers do.

Fourth, building relationships with teachers and other members of the school community was central to the leadership of principals in this study, because it was through these relationships that they established and maintained leader legitimacy, and encouraged commitment and effort towards making the goals of shared vision a reality. According to Chemers (2001) the decision to follow depends on the perception of the leader as credible and capable. Thus, a leader must be seen to be trustworthy and competent by followers. The evidence in this study suggests that these principals established and maintained their leadership credibility through the articulation and consistency of their example and actions with shared vision.

In addition, these school principals focused their attention on motivating teachers to apply their knowledge, capability and effort toward the attainment of shared vision, but this was not at the expense of individuals. Indeed the research suggests that the leadership behaviour, individual concern, which included accessibility, encouragement, provision of structures and resource support and recognition, was fundamental to transformational leadership practices in schools. Individual concern was not simply being helpful and considerate towards teachers and members of the school community. The data suggest that these school principals knew members of the teaching staff and members of the school community individually, and provided support through encouragement and recognition of individual efforts as well as direction and guidance based on individual needs and development. Effective motivation is based on a balance between an individual's wish for autonomy and need for structure (Chemers, 2001). Principals need to be aware that leadership in schools is mainly characterised by relationships with individuals, and it is through these relationships a principal is able to establish her/his leadership and encourage teachers to apply their abilities, skills and efforts towards shared purposes.

Finally, school contexts vary and so too, does the external environment. Principals should recognise the possibility that context may make leadership behaviours more or less effective. An important implication for a practising principal is that she/he must know and understand the contextual constraints placed on a school by the internal and external environment. Moreover, a principal must be able to adjust his/ her leadership behaviours in order to ensure that leadership is relevant and assists a school towards positive outcomes.

In summary, the study highlights the necessity of additional research into a dimension of transformational leadership that is argued to be critical for organisational performance in schools (Bass and Avolio, 1997; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999). Future research needs to investigate carefully the relationship of vision

(including its creation and communication) with genuine change in teaching and learning practices that enhance student learning outcomes.

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