

The Turnaround Principal: A Case Study in Relational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a qualitative case study on the unique leadership practices of a principal who transformed a struggling rural primary school in a low-income farming community. Previously on the verge of closure with an enrollment of fewer than 20 students, the school experienced a dramatic and sustained increase in student enrollment, reaching a stable population of 300. Through in-depth interviews and document analysis, this study examines how the principal's specific relational and community-centric leadership style not only saved the school but also built lasting trust and collaboration among parents and teachers. The chapter argues that this principal's success was rooted in a deeply empathetic and embedded leadership approach, offering a new framework for understanding effective leadership in small, rural educational settings that challenges traditional, top-down models. This study utilizes a qualitative case study methodology, drawing on semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents, as well as an analysis of school documents. The findings reveal that the principal's initial focus on **building genuine trust and confidence** through personal outreach and an open-door policy was the foundational step in the school's revitalization. This relational approach was coupled with the implementation of innovative, holistic programs, including those for improving academic performance and extracurricular activities, as well as unique initiatives focused on student well-being (e.g., mindfulness) and the educational development of parents. By empowering all stakeholders as active partners, the principal created a vibrant school culture that directly contributed to the dramatic increase in student enrollment and a positive shift in community perception. The chapter culminates in the proposal of a new theoretical framework, **embedded relational leadership**, which suggests that effective leadership in marginalized communities is profoundly shaped by a leader's ability to become an integral, trusted member of that community, rather than a top-down manager.

INTRODUCTION

From the Brink of Closure to a Thriving Community Hub

In the discourse on educational reform, the challenges facing small, rural schools are often overlooked. Characterized by limited resources, geographical isolation, and the constant threat of declining student populations, these institutions can fall into a vicious cycle of low enrollment and eventual closure. Yet, the story of this rural primary school serves as a powerful counter-narrative, demonstrating how a single leader's vision and unique practices can defy these odds. At its lowest point, with a student body of under 20 children, the school was deemed unsustainable. However, through a remarkable turnaround, it was revitalized under the leadership of a new principal, growing to a thriving student population of 300. This astonishing success, achieved in a community of poor farming families, challenges conventional wisdom about educational leadership. This chapter argues that the principal's effectiveness was not derived from a prescriptive, hierarchical management style but from a unique, relational approach that was highly sensitive to the socioeconomic context of the community it served. By examining this case study in detail, this chapter aims to provide a granular understanding of how trust, communication, and a shared vision can become the most potent tools for a principal in a small school.

The Leadership Landscape: A Review of Relevant Literature

Scholarly literature on educational leadership has predominantly focused on models designed for large, urban, or suburban school systems. Seminal theories such as **transformational leadership** (Burns, 1978), which focuses on inspiring and motivating followers, and **instructional leadership** (Hallinger, 2003), which centers on the direct improvement of teaching and learning, have provided valuable insights. However, these models often fail to account for the unique dynamics of small, rural schools. The literature on these smaller institutions highlights their potential for fostering stronger community ties, personalized learning, and a sense of belonging (Nieto, 2010), but it rarely delves into the specific leadership practices required to harness these advantages in the face of immense challenges. There is a clear gap in the research regarding the practices of successful principals who have overcome the specific challenges of low-income, rural communities, particularly when a school is facing imminent closure. This case study seeks to fill that void by providing a granular analysis of a leadership style that directly addressed these contextual needs, demonstrating how a relational and embedded approach can serve as a catalyst for transformative change and community renewal.

The Attributes of an Effective School and Principal

The concept of an "effective school" is a cornerstone of modern educational theory, defined not just by academic results but by its capacity for both quantitative and qualitative development. As noted by Good (1959), a school serves as a carefully curated and controlled environment for providing social acclimation and fostering maximum personal development in individuals. In the contemporary context, the school's role has expanded beyond simply imparting knowledge and discipline to becoming a dynamic institution that shapes students for the future needs of society. The central figure in this process is the principal, whose leadership is paramount to the school's success.

Research into effective school leadership consistently identifies a range of crucial attributes and competencies. Successful principals possess a unique blend of human, intellectual, and communication skills, coupled with a keen ability to make correct decisions and a strong sense of determination and discipline. A common thread among these leaders is a deep-seated dedication to their work, a high degree of selflessness, and the capacity for situational leadership. They maintain a clear and steadfast vision for the school's future, guiding their team toward a shared, common goal.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003) conducted foundational studies to identify the characteristics of effective school leadership, articulating six key features that enhance student learning. These include setting a direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, managing the instructional program, improving the school culture, and engaging with the community. While these broad categories provide a useful framework, this case study demonstrates that the application of these principles in a specific, high-need rural context requires a leadership style that is deeply relational and empathetic. The principal's success was not a result of a one-size-fits-all model but an intentional, context-specific application of these core competencies, particularly in building a culture of trust and shared ownership among all stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative Case Study

This chapter is based on a qualitative case study conducted as part of a Master of Education thesis. The study employed a single-case design to provide an in-depth exploration of the principal's leadership within a specific, rich context. The school was selected as a "critical case" due to its dramatic turnaround and location in a high-need rural area. Data was collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents. The interviews focused on capturing the participants' perceptions of the principal's leadership style, the changes they observed in the school and community, and the specific actions that built their trust and confidence. Additional data was gathered through the analysis of school documents, including enrollment records, parent outreach initiatives, and school development plans. The data was analyzed using a **thematic analysis** approach, with a focus on identifying recurring patterns and core themes in the principal's practices and their perceived impact on the school's growth and success. The use of multiple data sources (triangulation) ensured the validity and reliability of the findings.

Case Study: A Profile in Relational Leadership and Community Trust

The Pre-Turnaround Context

The school is located in a rural farming community where parents, primarily engaged in agriculture, often have low educational attainment and face significant socioeconomic challenges. Prior to the new principal's arrival, a palpable disconnect existed between the school and the community, leading to low trust and minimal parental engagement. Student enrollment had fallen below 20, leading to a decision by the authorities to close the school. The new principal, however, refused to accept this fate. Their approach was a radical departure from the top-down, bureaucratic leadership often found in larger systems. Instead of focusing on imposing a new vision, the principal's first step was to restore trust and build relationships.

Building Trust and Confidence: The Foundation of Success

Building trust and confidence was the cornerstone of the principal's success. This was not a passive process but a series of deliberate, proactive actions designed to rebuild the school's relationship with a skeptical community. The principal did not rely on formal directives or memos. Instead, they engaged in proactive, personal outreach, which was crucial for an agrarian community where people's lives are dictated by the cycles of farming.

- **Personal Outreach and Community Integration:** The principal made a concerted effort to meet parents on their own terms, often visiting their farms and homes, sometimes in the early mornings or late evenings to accommodate the farmers' work schedules. This simple act of personal outreach shattered previous barriers and built a foundation of trust. The principal listened to parents' concerns, understood their challenges, and made them feel like true partners in their children's education. A key part of this strategy involved the principal's direct participation in village community groups and other local events. They attended these gatherings not as an external authority figure but as a supportive educator, offering advice and guidance on the various needs of the parents. By embedding themselves in these local networks, the principal was able to build a deep, personal connection with the community, thereby establishing themselves as a trusted and reliable resource for families.
- **Fostering a Sense of Ownership:** The principal actively encouraged parents to participate in school activities, not just as attendees but as active contributors. This made parents feel a sense of ownership, which was a dramatic shift from the pre-turnaround environment. A key initiative was the development of a large, beautiful school garden. Recognizing the challenges of a rural location, particularly the lack of water during the dry season, the principal adopted a highly innovative approach. Instead of treating it as a school-led project, they divided the garden into separate "zones." These zones were then distributed among different groups of parents and students, empowering each group to take full responsibility for their section. The parents, with their vast knowledge of farming and horticulture, provided invaluable expertise, while the students were actively involved in planting and maintenance. A unique component of this project was the "one flower pot for one student" concept, which gave every child a personal stake in the garden's success.

This project transformed the school grounds and also cultivated a profound sense of communal pride and ownership. The parents saw their skills and knowledge being valued and applied to the school environment, and the students felt a personal connection to the plants they were nurturing. The garden became a living symbol of the school's revival, maintained through the collaborative efforts of the entire school community and a testament to the principal's ability to turn a challenge (lack of water) into an opportunity for collective action.

Effective Communication with All Stakeholders

The principal recognized that effective communication was the cornerstone of rebuilding the school's reputation. They established multiple, informal channels of communication, ensuring that information was not just disseminated but actively shared and discussed. This included regular, face-to-face meetings, a willingness to be available at any time, and the use of simple, accessible language that resonated with the community. This open line of communication replaced the previous formal, bureaucratic methods, which had alienated many parents.

The principal's communication style conveyed respect and partnership, making parents feel valued and empowered.

- **Dialogue with Parents and Community Members:** The principal's approach was a radical departure from the previous administration, which had a formal, top-down structure that limited parental access and communication. Under the new principal, an "open-door policy" was not just a phrase but a daily practice. Parents were encouraged to visit the school at any time to discuss their concerns, without the need for prior appointments. This immediate accessibility created a sense of partnership and broke down the formal barriers that had previously existed.

To facilitate this two-way communication, the principal also established regular forums, such as monthly parent-teacher meetings and informal community gatherings. These meetings were not one-way lectures but collaborative discussions where parents felt comfortable raising issues and offering suggestions. The principal's willingness to listen and act on feedback was a critical factor in building trust. As one parent noted, "The previous principal was like a king on a throne. We could never go near him. But with this principal, we feel like we are part of the family. He listens to us and solves our problems." Another parent echoed this sentiment, stating, "Before, we were afraid to come to the school. Now, we feel a sense of ownership. We know we can talk to the principal, and he will respect our opinion. He never makes us feel like we are poor or uneducated."

- **Empowering the Teaching Staff:** The principal's communication was not limited to the community. They also worked to cultivate a positive attitude and shared commitment among the teachers. Under the previous administration, teachers often felt isolated, lacking support and a sense of collective purpose. The new principal immediately sought to change this by fostering an environment of trust and professional collaboration. They maintained an open-door policy for teachers as well, making themselves available for informal consultations and discussions. This created an atmosphere where teachers felt safe to raise concerns, share innovative ideas, and seek guidance without fear of judgment.

To further this effort, the principal implemented new professional development opportunities that were directly linked to the school's shared goals. These were not generic training sessions but collaborative workshops focused on improving student outcomes, particularly through the use of new teaching methodologies tailored to the community's unique needs. This approach not only enhanced the teachers' skills but also empowered them as active participants in the school's transformation. As one teacher stated, "The previous principal just gave us orders. This principal asked for our opinions and let us lead. We feel like we are not just teachers, but leaders."

This shared vision was consistently reinforced through regular, democratic staff meetings where all voices were heard. The principal acted as a facilitator, guiding the conversation toward the common goal of student success and school revitalization. Another teacher's quote captured this shift perfectly: "Before, we had to follow a strict plan, and we felt like we were alone. Now, we work as a team. We are all on the same mission to save this school, and we trust that our principal is leading us in the right direction." This cultural shift from a top-down hierarchy to a collaborative community of practice was a fundamental component of the principal's success and directly contributed to the positive changes observed in the school.

A Vision for a Thriving School: From Survival to Excellence

Beyond trust and communication, the principal's leadership was characterized by a clear vision for the school's future. They transformed the institution from a place of last resort into a beacon of hope and a source of pride for the community. This vision was not imposed but was co-created through the principal's actions and their ability to get the community to buy into the school's success. The principal's efforts to raise the school's reputation led to a noticeable increase in student enrollment, which became a powerful, visible sign of the school's revitalization. This success was not limited to student numbers; it also positively influenced the teachers, fostering a good attitude and shared commitment to the educational mission.

- **Articulating and Sharing the Vision:** The principal's vision was not a rigid, top-down mandate but a simple, yet powerful, idea: to transform the school into the **"best primary school in the district."** This was a high-bar yet attainable goal that resonated deeply with the community's desire for a better future for

their children. The principal articulated this vision through informal conversations and formal meetings, consistently reinforcing the message that the school was a place of potential. The vision's goals were not just about academic results but about creating a holistic educational environment. These included improving academic outcomes so students could compete with those from more affluent schools, revitalizing the school's physical infrastructure, introducing extracurricular activities, and building a school culture based on mutual respect and shared responsibility. This vision resonated with the community's values because it promised a future where their children were not limited by their socioeconomic background, providing them with a tangible reason to believe in the school's potential.

- **Translating Vision into Action:** The principal's action plan was a direct manifestation of this vision, built upon the foundation of trust they had already established.
 - **Curriculum and Academic Excellence:** The principal worked directly with teachers to implement a more student-centered curriculum. They introduced a new reading program and after-school tutoring sessions, all introduced as collaborative efforts. The principal consistently communicated the "why" behind these changes, directly linking them to the shared vision of becoming the "best school in the district."
 - **Physical Infrastructure:** The school's image was dramatically improved by mobilizing the community. The school garden project, for example, wasn't just about aesthetics; it was a physical symbol of the school's revitalization. Parents and teachers worked together to clean, repair, and beautify the school grounds, a process that further strengthened trust and ownership. Classrooms and the library were renovated with donated materials, making the space more conducive to learning.
 - **Extracurricular Activities:** Understanding that a thriving school is more than a place for academics, the principal introduced sports teams and arts clubs. Community members, including parents with skills in farming and craftsmanship, were invited to help coach or lead workshops. This initiative was consistently communicated as a way to "build confidence and teamwork" in the students, a key component of the overall vision. These actions were a powerful demonstration of the principal's vision and reinforced the idea that every small step was part of a larger, collective journey toward a shared, successful future.

Innovative Programs and Holistic Development

The principal's leadership style extended beyond community relations and into the core of the school's educational programming. Recognizing that academic excellence was essential to building the school's reputation and providing a better future for the students, the principal introduced a series of innovative programs focused on the holistic development of students, parents, and teachers.

- **Improving Academic Performance:** The principal initiated targeted programs to improve student marks across all subjects. This involved strategic interventions and support systems tailored to the needs of a low-income student body.
 - **Actionable Items:** The principal introduced a "catch-up" program for students who were struggling with basic literacy and numeracy. This program, which took place for an hour after school, was staffed by teachers who volunteered their time, demonstrating their commitment to the shared vision. The principal also secured grant funding to provide students with updated textbooks and learning materials, ensuring they had the same resources as students in more affluent schools. One teacher highlighted this change by stating, "The new principal gave us the tools to do our job effectively. We finally felt empowered to make a real difference in these children's lives."
- **Enhancing Extracurricular Activities and Sports:** To cultivate well-rounded students and a vibrant school culture, the principal expanded the school's extracurricular and sports offerings. These programs served as a powerful tool for engaging students and parents and fostering a sense of pride.
 - **Actionable Items:** Recognizing the community's lack of resources, the principal introduced sports such as volleyball and football, which required minimal equipment. A parent, who was a skilled

craftsman, volunteered to build the goalposts, further cementing the school-community partnership. These programs served as a source of pride for the students and the wider community, and the school's first-ever football tournament drew a large crowd of enthusiastic parents.

- **Mindfulness and Well-being Programs:** The principal recognized that the emotional and mental well-being of students and teachers was as important as academic success. They introduced mindfulness or similar programs to help students cope with the challenges of their daily lives.
 - **Actionable Items:** The principal initiated a simple 10-minute mindfulness session at the start of each school day, where students were led in breathing exercises and guided meditation. This initiative was received positively by both students and teachers, who reported feeling more focused and less stressed. A teacher noted, "It was a simple addition, but it made a huge difference. The students were calmer, and the classroom environment was more conducive to learning. It showed the principal cared about our well-being, not just our test scores."
- **Improving Parent Knowledge and Skills:** A unique aspect of the principal's leadership was the focus on the education of parents. The principal understood that empowering parents with new knowledge and skills was key to creating a supportive home environment for learning.
 - **Actionable Items:** The principal organized a series of evening workshops for parents on topics they had expressed interest in, such as basic literacy and health and nutrition. These workshops were led by volunteers from the community, further strengthening local ties. One parent remarked that the workshops had "made us feel respected and valued. It was not just about what our children needed from us; it was also about what the school could do for us as parents." This reciprocal relationship, built on trust and a sense of shared purpose, was a powerful driver of the school's transformation.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Synthesizing Findings and Contributing to Theory

Thematic Synthesis and Contextual Leadership

This case study provides a compelling argument for a more nuanced understanding of leadership, one that recognizes that in small, community-driven environments, the principal's greatest asset is their ability to build and sustain genuine human relationships. The findings, derived from the thematic analysis of interviews (using the Ci8 model), strongly revealed that the principal's personal actions—specifically their consistent presence, humility, and willingness to collaborate—were the primary factor in rebuilding **confidence and belief** in the school's future, particularly among parents.

The success demonstrates that in high-need rural contexts, a leader's relational and empathetic approach can be a more powerful catalyst for change than a focus on rigid academic metrics or administrative efficiency. This directly addresses the research gap, noted in the **literature review**, that existing models often fail to account for the unique dynamics of small, rural schools and their intense reliance on community trust. The principal's effectiveness stemmed from the highly contextualized application of their personal attributes—specifically their superior **human and communication skills**, coupled with a **deep-seated dedication and determination** (as identified by seminal research on effective school leadership, e.g., Good, 1959; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003)—to overcome a deficit of trust and physical resources. Furthermore, the principal's capacity for **situational leadership** allowed them to prioritize community engagement over typical administrative tasks during the initial turnaround phase.

Comparison with Foundational Leadership Models

The principal's practices in this case study, while achieving outcomes described by classic models, fundamentally reorder their typical implementation, supporting the need for a **situational leadership** approach, a key trait of effective principals highlighted in the theoretical review.

Relational Trust as the Precursor to Instructional Success

Instructional Leadership (Hallinger, 2003): This model focuses on the principal's role in managing the instructional program. While the case study principal successfully improved academic performance (Section 4.5), these improvements were secondary outcomes. They were only possible **after** the principal successfully executed the relational phase (building trust and restoring enrollment). In this context, **embedded relational leadership served as the indispensable prerequisite for effective instructional leadership**. The principal could not focus on curriculum or pedagogy until the community believed in the school again and returned their children, illustrating a reordering of priorities in a crisis context.

Transformational Leadership (Burns, 1978): This theory emphasizes inspiring followers. The case study principal was indeed transformative, moving the school from imminent closure to success. However, their transformational power stemmed less from formal, charismatic authority and more from **humble and democratic behavior** (findings discussed in the subsequent chapter). As the findings confirm, they were emphatically **not an autocratic individual**, which is a defining feature of successful small-school leaders. They inspired followers not through grand gestures, but by being a **visible, selfless, and dedicated** (attributes of effective leaders defined in the literature) facilitator who directed the team towards the right course, even amidst significant obstacles.

Alignment with Effective School Leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003)

The principal's approach perfectly maps onto the six key features that Leithwood and Riehl (2003) identify as crucial for enhancing student learning, while prioritizing **Community Engagement** as the foundational activity:

1. **Engaging with the Community:** This was the initial priority, executed through Empathetic Engagement (farm visits) and Community-as-Partner initiatives (the school garden), thereby transforming the school's reputation and building social capital—directly addressing the need to **engage with the community**.
2. **Setting Direction:** Achieved through **Shared Visioning**, ensuring the goal of "best primary school in the district" was collectively owned, rather than imposed by bureaucratic decree—fulfilling the requirement of **setting a direction**.
3. **Developing People:** Demonstrated by prioritizing teacher development and empowering them through a **non-autocratic, democratic style**, fostering the positive teacher attitudes necessary for student success (as found in Section 4)—aligning with the goal of **developing people and improving school culture**.
4. **Managing the Instructional Program:** Only once trust was established, the principal implemented targeted instructional programs (catch-up classes, tutoring) that were successfully adopted because the staff and parents believed in the leader's **competence and integrity** (a necessity for effective school management)—thus, **managing the instructional program** was made possible by the relational foundation.

A New Framework: Embedded Relational Leadership

The principal's practices in this case study point to a new, context-specific model of leadership that we term **embedded relational leadership**. This framework is defined by three core pillars that explicitly address the shortcomings of traditional models in high-need rural contexts:

1. **Empathetic Engagement:** The leader actively seeks to understand the lived experiences, values, and concerns of the community they serve. The principal embodied this by visiting farms and homes during non-school hours, demonstrating a level of **humility and dedication** (specific attributes confirmed in the study) that transcended the formal professional boundary.
2. **Shared Visioning:** The leader does not impose a vision but instead facilitates a process through which the community, including parents and teachers, co-creates a shared vision for the school's future. The data confirms this principal was emphatically **not an autocratic individual**, preferring a democratic, consensus-driven approach that empowered all stakeholders, which is tied to the leadership attribute of **making correct decisions** by involving diverse perspectives.

3. **Community-as-Partner:** The school is not treated as a separate entity but as a core component of the community, where parents are seen as essential partners in their children's education and in the school's development. This directly led to the rise in enrollment and the positive shift in teacher and student attitudes, confirming that the principal's **leadership competence and dedication** (attributes identified as crucial for success in the theoretical review) fueled the school's positive reputation.

Embedded Relational Leadership (ERL): A Context-Sensitive Model for High-Need Educational Settings

Conceptual Definition:

Embedded Relational Leadership (ERL) is a leadership model grounded in deep community engagement, shared purpose, and mutual accountability. It positions school leadership not as an external administrative function but as an embedded relational process that aligns the school's goals with the lived realities, values, and aspirations of its community. (Fletcher, 2004)

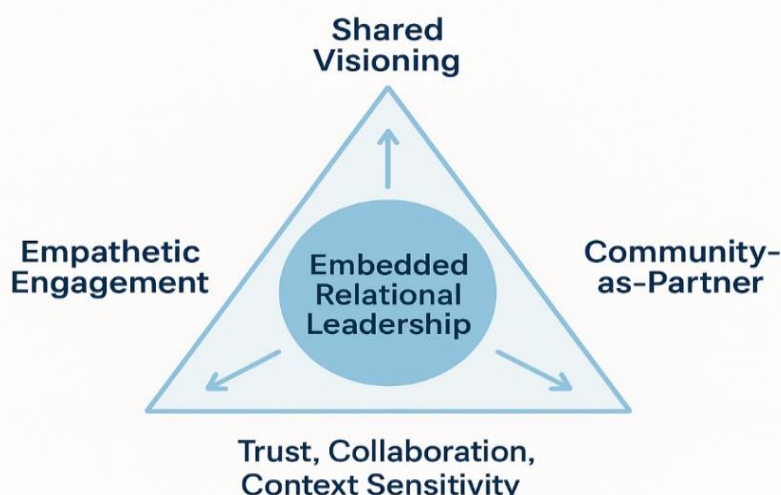
Core Assumptions:

1. **Leadership is relational, not hierarchical** – it flourishes through trust, empathy, and collaboration.
2. **Context defines leadership effectiveness** – successful leadership adapts to socio-cultural realities.
3. **Communities are co-educators** – schools thrive when communities are active partners, not passive stakeholders.

The Three Pillars of Embedded Relational Leadership (ERL)

Pillar	Description	Leadership Attributes	Outcomes
1. Empathetic Engagement	Leaders immerse themselves in the lived experiences of their communities to build authentic trust.	Humility, emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity	Strengthened trust and mutual respect between school and community
2. Shared Visioning	Leaders co-create the school's direction through participatory processes involving teachers, parents, and community members.	Inclusivity, democratic decision-making, strategic foresight	Collective ownership of school goals; improved stakeholder commitment
3. Community-as-Partner	The school and community operate as interdependent systems with shared responsibility for student success.	Collaboration, stewardship, social capital building	Increased enrollment, enhanced school reputation, improved learner engagement

Figure 1: The Three Pillars of Embedded Relational Leadership (ERL)



Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for educational policy and practice, particularly in rural and low-resource settings.

- **Principal Training and Development:** Principal preparation programs should place a greater emphasis on social and emotional intelligence, community engagement, and empathetic leadership. The skills required to build trust in a small community—specifically, the **human and communication skills** identified by Good (1959) and Leithwood and Riehl (2003) as core leadership competencies—are fundamentally different from those needed for a large, urban school.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** When selecting principals for small, struggling schools, policymakers and school boards should prioritize candidates who demonstrate a strong commitment to community-building and relational leadership, rather than solely focusing on academic or administrative credentials.
- **Decentralized Decision-Making:** The success of this case study suggests that a degree of autonomy and flexibility at the local school level can be highly beneficial. Empowering principals to make decisions that are tailored to the specific needs of their communities can lead to more effective and sustainable change.

CONCLUSION

A New Framework for Small School Leadership

The case of this rural primary school offers a powerful and compelling lesson in educational leadership. It demonstrates that in contexts defined by community poverty and social challenges, success is not solely a matter of academic rigor or administrative efficiency. Instead, it is rooted in a leadership style that is fundamentally relational, empathetic, and responsive. The principal's ability to forge deep, genuine connections with parents and teachers was the central catalyst for the school's revival, proving that trust and partnership are the most potent tools for change.

The findings from this study point to a new, context-specific model of leadership that we term **embedded relational leadership**. This framework moves beyond conventional approaches by highlighting the critical need for a leader to become an integral, trusted member of the community they serve. It is defined by three core pillars: **emphetic engagement**, where the leader actively seeks to understand the lived experiences of their community; **shared visioning**, where the community co-creates a vision for the school's future; and **community-as-partner**, where the school is seen as a core component of the community itself.

This case study provides a compelling argument for a more nuanced understanding of leadership, one that recognizes the principal's greatest asset in small, community-driven environments is their ability to build and sustain genuine human relationships. The dramatic transformation of this school—from the brink of closure to a thriving hub of learning—serves as a powerful testament to this approach. Future research could explore the long-term sustainability of this model and its applicability to other rural or marginalized school systems, further solidifying the importance of relational leadership in educational turnaround.

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