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Building Capacity: Teachers Thinking and Working Together to Create New Futures.

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Abstract

This paper is based on research illuminating organisation-wide processes used during a whole school revitalisation process, IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools). It explores the organisation-wide processes that engage teachers in futuristic thinking and the creation of shared meaning. The paper explores how teachers engaging in processes of school revitalisation think and work together to add significant value to their successful practices. The school revitalisation process at the heart of this research centres on the work of teachers and recognises the fundamental importance of teacher leadership in successful school change. Creative organisation-wide processes link personal pedagogical work with the work of the broader professional community of the school. This linking of personal and school wide pedagogical aspirations and understandings provides a foundation for culture building and the creation of new futures. It enables the professional community to build the capacity of the school to add value to classroom and school wide practices - improving teaching and learning as a result.

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Introduction

Innovative Design for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) is a school revitalisation project that uses organisation-wide processes to encourage the individual and the community to build a preferred future. In particular, these organisation-wide processes engage teachers in futuristic thinking and the creation of a shared meaning system within the organisation. This paper explores how teachers engaging in processes of school revitalisation think and work together to add significant value to their successful practices. The IDEAS project (Andrews et al., 2004; Andrews & Lewis, 2004) centres on the work of teachers and recognises the fundamental importance of teacher leadership (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002) in successful school revitalisation.

Futuristic and creative organisation-wide processes link the personal pedagogical work with the work of the broader professional community of the school (Andrews et al., 2004; Andrews & Crowther, 2003; Andrews & Lewis, 2004). Drawing on research by the University of Southern Queensland Leadership Research Institute research team this paper illustrates the links between personal and schoolwide pedagogical aspirations and illuminates the creation of shared meaning within the organisation. It is this shared meaning that provides a foundation for culture building and the creation of a preferred future. These processes of thinking and working together by the professional community build the capacity of the school to add value to classroom and school-wide practices - improving teaching and learning as a result.

IDEAS – a process that builds capacity for school revitalisation.

IDEAS (Innovative Design for Enhancing Improvement in Schools) is a response by a range of educators from Queensland schools, systems and universities representing seven years of thinking, dialoguing and critiquing the question: how do you build capacity for ongoing school improvement that enhances school outcomes? Compelling research evidence from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995) demonstrated conclusively that when teachers engage as a professional community to shape a school philosophy that fits the community, and when they then proceed to develop a pedagogical approach that complements that

philosophy, the effects on student achievement, particularly for disadvantaged students, can be quite remarkable. That insight, that the professional community of the school must be given responsibility for school revitalisation and improvement, remains fundamental to IDEAS today.

In late 1997 the original IDEAS team established a working relationship with Professor Fred Newmann and Dr Bruce King, the principal Wisconsin researchers. As further findings from the Wisconsin research and other American research (Stringfield & Herman, 1996) and Australian projects (Cuttance, 1998; Hill & Crevola, 1999; Crowther, Hann, & McMaster, 2000) became available, they were explored in the context of the IDEAS trials with Queensland State schools. Essential IDEAS concepts were generated out of this developmental work and refined over the period as the school experiences expanded and to date cover over 200 in Queensland and state and private schools in New South Wales, Canberra and Western Australia.

What is IDEAS?

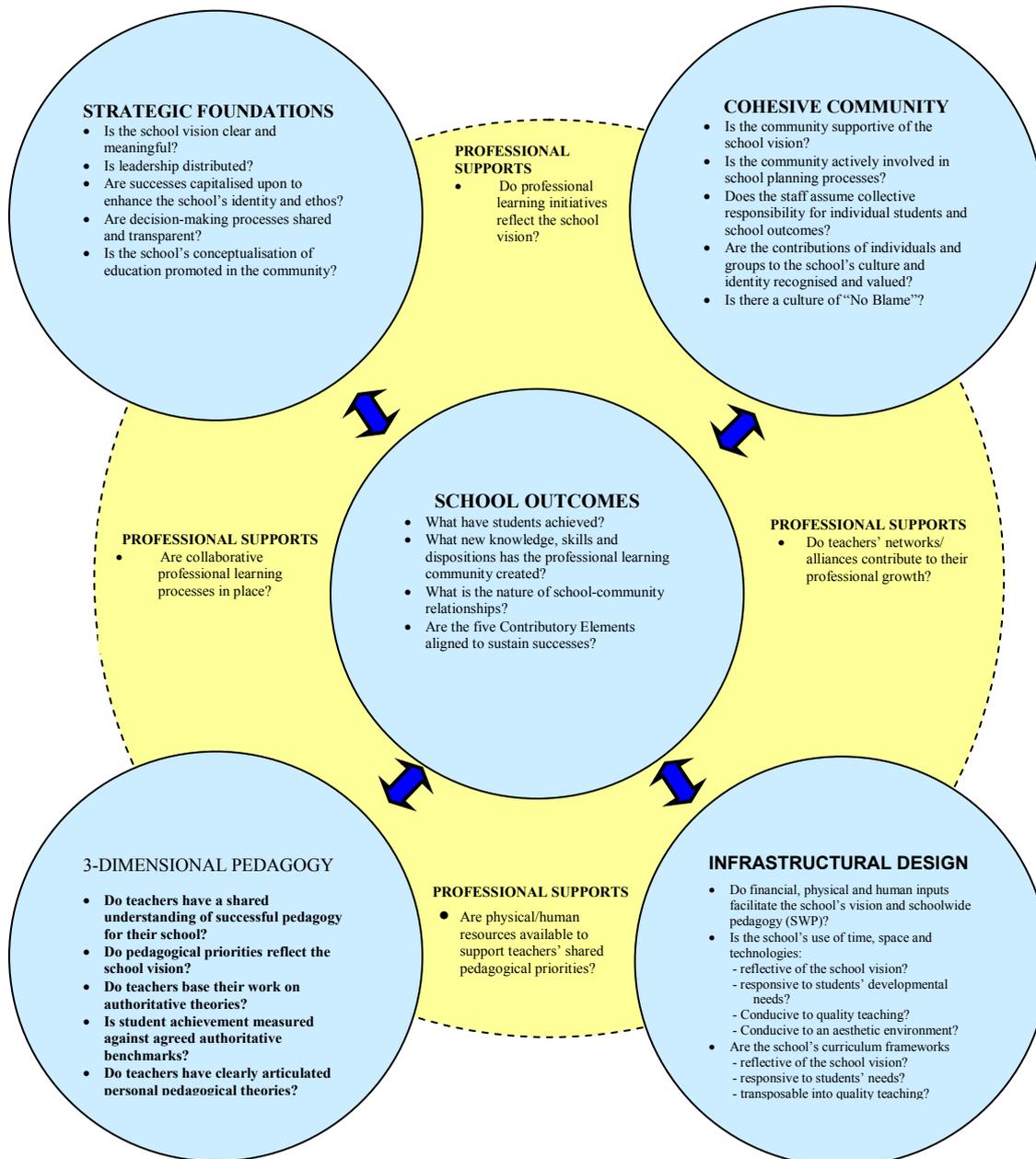
IDEAS is an approach to school revitalisation that is distinguished by use of three interdependent frameworks, namely, the image of a successful school (the Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes); the *ideas* process and Parallel Leadership.

The Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes (RBF) synthesises significant current research to build the framework of an aligned organisation - a successful school (Figure 1). IDEAS challenges schools to image their future and work towards creating this envisioned future.

As a conceptual model for school revitalisation the RBF has been developed in full cognisance of significant global research findings about successful organisational reform (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Crevola & Hill, 1998; Cuttance, 2000). It consists of five Contributory Elements (Strategic Foundations, Cohesive Community, Infrastructural Design, Three-Dimensional Pedagogy (3D.P), Professional Supports and School Outcomes) which, when investigated in a school community survey, provide relevant data as a starting point in generating an image of

what the community aspire their school to become. Enhanced school outcomes (student achievement, knowledge creation, development of community relationships and sustainability) come as a result of alignment between the contributory elements.

Figure 1 The Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes (LRI IDEAS Team April 2002)



This framework has been developed through a five-year strategic alliance between the University of Southern Queensland's Leadership Research Institute and Education Queensland. The University of Wisconsin-Madison's longitudinal studies of successful restructuring in American schools (e.g. Newmann and Wehlage, 1995; King and Newmann, 2000) have been particularly helpful.

The concept of alignment reflects the work of Drucker (1946) when he explored the concept of harmony to describe an effective organisation. He reflected, an institution is like a tune; it is not constituted by individual sounds but by the relations between them (p.26). This is the same phenomenon that Murphy (1992) argued was one of the

sustaining legacies of school improvement. This legacy he described as attention to consistency throughout the school, demonstrating strong structural, symbolic and cultural links throughout the organisation. (Crowther, Andrews, Dawson, & Lewis, 2001) have more recently expanded this concept, labelling it as ‘alignment’ as it related to development of a distinctive identity, that is schools create a meaningful alignment between school vision, community input, physical infrastructure, classroom practices and professional development, and in so doing produce an enhanced sense of identity and a greater capacity to pursue high expectations for student achievement (Introduction, p. 4).

Parallel Leadership in IDEAS schools engages teacher leaders and administrator leaders in collaborative action, while at the same time encouraging the fulfilment of their individual capabilities, aspirations and responsibilities (Crowther et al., 2002). Based on the characteristics of mutualism, a sense of shared purpose and allowance for individual expression, it leads to strengthened alignment between the school’s vision and the school’s teaching and learning practices. It facilitates the development of a professional learning community, culture building and schoolwide approaches to teaching and learning. It makes possible the enhancement of school identity, teachers’ professional esteem, community support and students’ achievements in the quest for enhanced action and sustainability. Actions of teacher leaders in IDEAS schools are outlined on Table 1.

The *ideas* process enables groups of professionals to work together to create understandings that could not easily be created by individuals. The professional community of the school engages in collaborative learning in order to enhance the school’s approach to teaching and learning and to heighten the integration of teaching and learning with the school’s vision, values and infrastructures. It has five distinct phases, linked in a conceptual sequence as illustrated in Figure 2.

Table 1. The Teachers as leaders Framework.

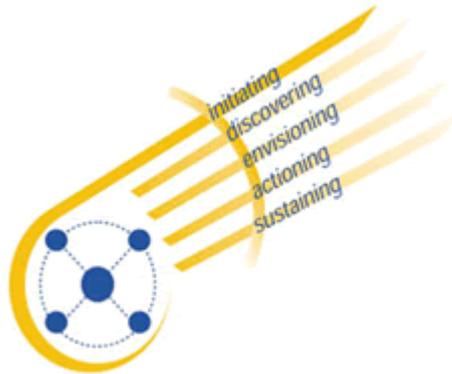
| |
|---|
| <p>Chart 1: The Teachers as Leaders Framework.</p> <p>Teacher leaders:.....</p> <p>Convey convictions about a “better world”, by, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• articulating a positive future for students• showing a genuine interest in students’ lives• contributing to an image of teachers as “professionals who make a difference”• gaining respect and trust in the broader community• demonstrating tolerance and reasonableness in difficult situations <p>Strive for authenticity in their teaching learning and assessment practices, by, for example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• creating learning experiences related to students’ needs• connecting teaching, learning and assessment to students’ futures• seeking deep understanding of tacit teaching and learning processes• valuing teaching as a key profession in shaping meaning systems <p>Facilitate communities of learning through organization-wide processes, by, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• encouraging a shared, schoolwide approach to pedagogy• approaching professional learning as consciousness-raising about complex issues• facilitating understanding across diverse groups while also respecting individual differences• synthesizing new ideas out of colleagues’ dialogue and activities <p>Confront barriers in the school’s culture and structures, by, for example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. “testing the boundaries” rather than accepting the status quo <ul style="list-style-type: none">• engaging administrators as potential sources of assistance and advocacy• accessing political processes in and out of the school• standing up for children, especially marginalized or disadvantaged individuals or groups <p>Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action, by, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• organizing complex tasks effectively• maintaining focus on issues of importance• nurturing networks of support• managing issues of time and pressure through priority-setting <p>Nurture a culture of success, by, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• acting on opportunities for others to gain success and recognition• adopting a "no blame" attitude when things go wrong• creating a sense of community identity and pride |
|---|

Source: (Crowther et al., 2002, p4-5).

Therefore the ideas process, a process of organisational and individual learning, enables the creation of an envisioned future for the school developed through a collective commitment to building this future. The premise is that teachers’ professional learning is a fundamental requirement of school revitalisation (Geijsel, Slegers, van den Berg, & Kelchtermans, 2001; Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2001). The key is that teachers are actively involved in studying professional problems, making decisions as to what to do about them, and being committed to achieving results in implementing those decisions (Owens, 1998). The professional community develops a shared approach to pedagogy that enables a school wide approach to teaching learning and assessment, that focuses the work of teachers and the infrastructure and professional development that supports their work. The creation of the new image of the organisation is the result of leadership of the professional community in mutual relationship with the strategic work of the administration, that

is, parallelism and that re-images roles and responsibilities in the organisation – pedagogical leadership, 3 Dimensional Pedagogy (Andrews & Crowther, 2003) (3D.P) and a metastrategic leadership (Crowther et al., 2002).

Figure 2 The *ideas* Process



initiating: resolving to become an IDEAS school, establishing a management team (Ideas School Management Team - ISMT) and appointing an IDEAS school-based facilitator (s);

discovering: revealing your school's most successful practices and key challenges and sharing collective responsibility for the situation in a no blame environment;

envisioning: picturing a preferred future for your school - an inspirational vision, and an agreed approach to pedagogy;

actioning: implementing plans to align school practices and structures with your school's revitalised vision;

sustaining: keeping the revitalisation process going by building on successes and embedding processes into organisational operations and management structures.

In Summary ...

IDEAS uses conceptual frameworks that enable the professional community of a school to capture their shared aspirations in a vision and, placing pedagogy at the centre of the school improvement process, to design responsive learning environments. The knowledge created by the professional learning community (captured in the vision and organisation wide pedagogy) interacts with processes of culture-building and professional learning in the IDEAS Project to contribute to enhanced school capacity. The processes of culture building relate to a shared

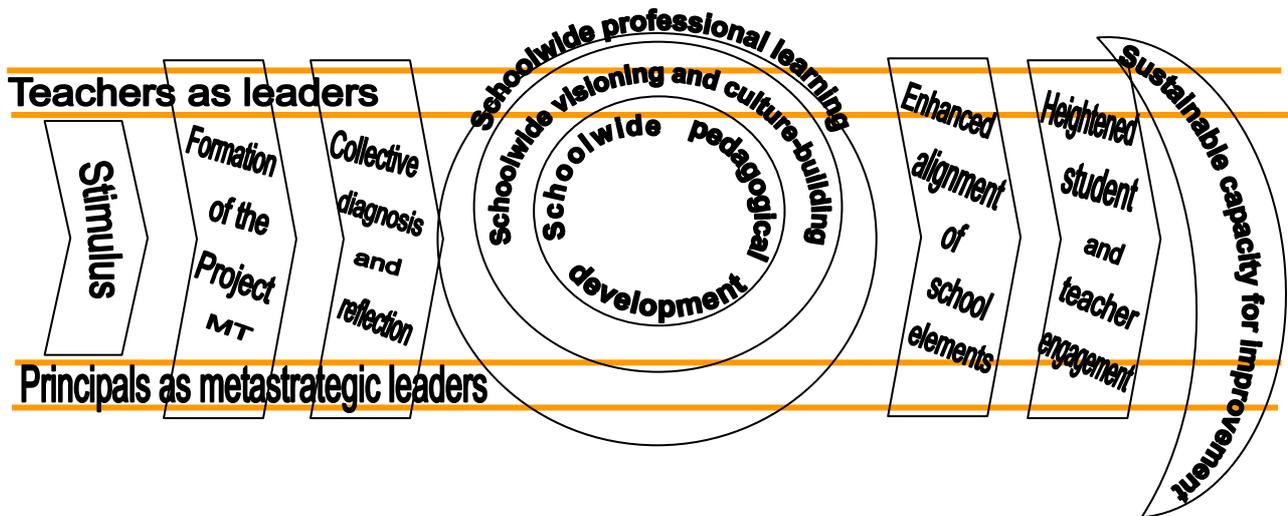
understandings developed by the professional community as a way of working in the organisation (Schein, 1985).

King & Newmann (2000) defined organisational capacity building as the collective power of the professional community of the school to improve student achievement through professional learning. Further, they indicated school capacity has three dimensions – teachers’ knowledge, skills and dispositions, the strength of the school wide professional community, and coherence of the school program. While the IDEAS view is very similar, it also encompasses the view that the processes of culture building, schoolwide pedagogy (SWP) and professional learning are closely integrated and when successful integration of these processes occurs, the school’s capacity has been enhanced. Research by Andrews & Lewis (2000) in an IDEAS school substantiates the proposition that teachers who develop a professional learning community not only enhance the knowledge base of the group but that this knowledge also impact significantly on their work in their classrooms.

Taken together, the three components – the Research-based Framework, the *ideas* process and parallel leadership – represent a conceptualisation of processes of successful school revitalisation. Figure 3 contains a diagrammatic representation of an integration of these three components.

Through their involvement in school improvement processes teachers develop contextualised knowledge and a shared meaning system (captured in the vision and schoolwide pedagogy). The increased capacity of organisations and individuals to learn through engagement focused on the work of teachers is based on clear principles of practice, quality professional relationships, professional conversations that use dialogical processes (Isaacs, 1999), connectivity, networking, thinking together, and serendipity. These processes also encourage ongoing learning, new ways of working and pedagogy that is both culturally appropriate and sensitive. Unifying and underpinning the school improvement process is a leadership relationship based on parallelism. This leadership construct acknowledges the diversity of roles of people in a 21st Century organisation and in particular the changing roles of teacher as knowledge creator. Leadership in IDEAS schools is a creative process based on parallelism.

Figure 3: Successful school revitalisation: the IDEAS way



Source: Crowther & Andrews, ARC Research Report (2003)

Futuristic and creative processes that engage the professional community in thinking and working together has become the work of IDEAS school communities. As Professor Crowther (Andrews et al., 2004) asserts, these schools have the potential to reshape their communities and in so doing demonstrate to their communities how "new knowledge" is created.

Based on our studies we have in fact been able to offer a definition of that very elusive concept, "knowledge society":

communities of people working together so that their collective intelligence results in creation of new knowledge that enhances their personal efficacy and their quality of life and enables them to contribute to a more sustainable and better world for others (preface,p.4).

As Figure 3 illustrates, capacity for school revitalisation is built through the adoption of a proven school improvement process (*ideas*), a heightened sense of professionalism through the school community taking collective responsibility for the organisation, parallel leadership and new ways of working together. Capacity is also enhanced by inclusive school wide dialogical strategies. The outcomes for the organisation are evidence of goal achievement, enhanced alignment and the creation of a new identity, a clearer sense of 'who we are'.

Australian Longitudinal Research

This paper draws on three research sources, namely, the case studies arising out of the ARC Research Project (Crowther & Andrews, 2003), the Evaluation of the National

IDEAS Trial (Chesterton & Duignan, 2004) and the case study developed from research arising from an Early Researcher Grant (Lewis). This paper uses the emerging understandings from these research studies to explore an aspect the relationship between a heightened sense of professionalism and the contribution this has towards building organisational capacity for ongoing school improvement. Table 1 outlines the development of these conceptual understandings over the period 1997 – 2004.

Table 1: Longitudinal Research creates IDEAS

| Phases | Action | Schools Involved | Research Project |
|---|--|--|---|
| Phase 1: 1997-1998 | Creation of the RBF and the concept of Organisational Alignment. Using an adaptation of the 4D process (Cooperrider et al., 1996) and the creation of Diagnostic Inventories relative to the Framework. | Five Queensland (Qld) State Schools - "BIGWIGS" | IDEAS builds on international and Australian research in areas of school improvement and Leadership (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995). Education Queensland (EQld) and University of Southern Queensland/ Leadership Research Institute (USQ/LRI) |
| Phase 2: 1997-2000 | Creation of Parallelism – Teacher Leadership and Principal Leadership. | Australian Research Council (ARC) – 5 Schools and Australian Government DEYTA Project– 9 Schools (Primary and Secondary – State and private) 45 State Primary and Secondary Schools | Australian Research Council (ARC) - Teachers as Leaders and Innovative Best Practices Project (IBPP) - Leadership for Successful School Innovation Projects (Cuttance, 2001). USQ/LRI and EQld |
| Phase 3: 2000 | Exploration of the use of the 3 Core Concepts – RBF, <i>ideas</i> process and Parallel Leadership. Refinement of the RBF and the process - now developed as <i>ideas</i> . Development of the concept of Schoolwide Pedagogy . | Cluster of 26 Schools – Qld State Primary and Secondary Schools | Strategic Alliance between EQld and USQ/LRI. |
| 1999-2003 | Exploring understandings of the creation of contextualised professional knowledge by teachers in IDEAS schools | 5 Qld Primary and Secondary Schools | Doctoral research project – Dr Marian Lewis |
| Phase 4: 2001 – 2002 and 2002-2003 | Systemic trial of the refined IDEAS Revitalisation Project –using refined framework and process and a new conceptualization of the work of the 21 st century teacher – 3-D.P | 29 New Qld State Schools and 25 Continuing Qld State Schools throughout followed by 22 State Schools in Queensland. | ARC-SPIRT grant 2001 (Australian Research Council Competitive Grant Scheme) Prof Crowther and Dr Andrews. Strategic Alliance between EQld and USQ/LRI. |
| Phase 5 2002-2003 National Trial & a cluster of Qld State and private schools | IDEAS project trialed in schools new contexts – other states of Australia and in state and Catholic Schools in NSW, Canberra-Goulburn Archdiocese and Western Australia. Qld Cluster development –in Toowoomba, in Rockhampton, and schools in Cairns | 4 State schools in NSW and 4 in WA and 4 Catholic Schools in Canberra. Continued work in the Torres Straits, Qld Schools – State and Private (20 schools) | Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST) Trial – with the USQ Ed Qld Alliance. ARC-SPIRT study continues in the Qld context, now including work with Indigenous schools using culturally sensitive processes. Two Doctoral students explore the concept of collective intelligence and re-imagining leadership... |
| 2003-2004 | IDEAS concepts on Leadership and Impact of SWP – a Case Study | National Project School. | Early Researcher Grant – Dr Marian Lewis |

The development of IDEAS also represents a unique professional relationship between those educators who work in schools and those that work at universities.

IDEAS demands of university educators that they engage with teachers and school

administrators on their terms in their workplaces. Whatever convictions or views of the world may guide university educators, they are secondary in IDEAS to illuminating the work of schools and assisting teachers and school administrators to achieve clarified direction, shared pedagogy and aligned infrastructures. The university educators working with schools with IDEAS have adopted a vision, namely, to inspire IDEAS schools to engage in *journeys of self-discovery which will ensure they achieve sustainable excellence in teaching and learning*.

The cameos that follow capture insights into aspects of two IDEAS schools journeys, aspects of which illustrate the contribution of the professional community to processes of school revitalisation (refer figure 3). These processes build an organisation that has the capacity to sustain improvement. A previous study (Andrews & Lewis, 2004) illustrated the creation of a metaphoric school vision and schoolwide approach to pedagogy that created a distinctive culture and enhanced outcomes for teachers, students and the broader community. The coherence that is developed through vision and schoolwide pedagogy creates an *aligned* organisation. The two cameos shed light on two other journeys – the first, Newlyn Public a school self identified as *at the bottom of the barrel* and the other Laurelvale State School, already classified as a *good school* has worked with IDEAS for more than three years.

The schools have been selected to illustrate how these schools, starting at different organisational situations have worked with common concepts of school revitalisation. Each school has contextualised the IDEAS concepts and has created a new culturally distinctive organisation able to respond to demands of their local community as well as broader systemic demands.

Cameo 1 Newlyn Public School

Newlyn Public school is located in the outer Western suburbs of Sydney, NSW Australia in an area renowned for its high level of social and economic disadvantage. Many of the 480 primary aged students attending the school face significant challenges arising from their home situations. The teachers describe Newlyn as a *'tough' school with tough kids and tough days, a place where you have to work hard*

and be resilient. This brief narrative tracks a relatively short period in the school's history – from the start of 2002. It is a story of significance because in that time, while the buildings remain the same, a 'new' school has been built. Newlyn has transformed itself from a school characterised by low expectations, poor achievement, survival teaching and a very difficult social and emotional climate into a very different organisation. Teacher reflections on the recent past include:

When I came into the school (in 1999) I was told basically that all I had to do was survive in the classroom – that meant survive, manage and then, if I could, teach (Matthew, teacher).

When I first started it was 'here's your classroom key, there's your class-list. I'll see you half yearly for reports'. That was pretty much the end of it (Sam, teacher)

[Before, as a new teacher].it could be intimidating to ask or inquire ...Even to the extent of sometimes getting a response that bordered on abuse (Focus Group 6/04).

The 'new' school is a totally different place. Student achievement and behaviour have improved. The classroom environment is supportive but expectations are high. Working together in new ways, teachers have taken on a significant pedagogical leadership and decision-making role, becoming key stakeholders in the ongoing improvement of the school. There is a clear direction, a shared understanding of how collectively articulated goals are to be achieved and a strong sense of being able to 'make a difference' in the lives of the students. The school culture for both teachers and students is characterised by openness, support and shared responsibility.

Much of this change may be attributed to the school's engagement with IDEAS beginning in the second half of 2002. The process of change, however, began at the start of that year, with the appointment of a new principal, Gavin McRae. Gavin was disturbed by what we found.

First term when I was actually here in school – I found it very challengingI do have expectations...I decided in Week 6 of Term 1 – no, stuff this, I'm not putting up with any more nonsense...and I became the sort of leader who said this is not right, we need to make ourselves more challenged in regards to achieving our results (Principal).

Gavin's decision to bring about change was fully supported by Zoë, the Deputy Principal and Nikki, the Assistant Principal (Literacy), two committed and talented middle managers in the school.

...the circumstances were such that achievement was so low that we had to do something. A couple of things happened to draw it to our attention just how low achievement was. So, something had to happen (Nikki, Middle Manager)

The initial response was to insist that all teachers taught a two hour literacy block each day and that all aspects of the literacy program were addressed. A similar numeracy block was subsequently introduced. While these actions had the effect of demanding a higher standard of teaching and learning – they were highly prescriptive. Teachers complied, though not necessarily willingly.

It was at this stage that the school began its engagement with IDEAS – with Zoë and Nikki as the in-school facilitators. While perhaps initially perceiving that IDEAS was another thing being 'imposed' on them, the teachers began a process that was to fundamentally change the nature of the school and their ways of thinking and working together. The Diagnostic Inventory, administered in October 2002, indicated that while the parents the students were generally pleased with the school, the teachers were less positive. The teacher data revealed that staff morale was low and teachers had a low opinion of school achievements. While recognising the need for a shared vision and further development of pedagogical practice, teachers were concerned at the levels of trust and respect and about their lack of involvement in decision making (Zoë and Nikki, presentation 2/04). Gavin, Zoë and Nikki knew then that the starting point for significant change centred on working with the staff. The intent of this administration team was to work as a school with the *ideas* process to improve school outcomes, particularly in relation to student achievement and staff interaction – this marked the beginning of the development a pedagogical framework that became the 'Newlyn way' – '*a way of thinking that affects everything thing we do, something that flows through everything*' (Rob, teacher).

The framework developed by Newlyn has three components – a vision underpinned by a set of values and a set of pedagogical principals that are grounded in the values and align with the vision. The values, identified in a process involving teachers, students and parents, represent what all regard as central to Newlyn's future success.

This was an achievement in that despite the different groups and diversity within the staff, values held-in-common were identified and embraced.

We've got a fairly diverse staff - there was discussion over the wording but we all ended up at the same point after a while. That was really good because it showed that even though we have such a diversity of people we still all came to the same conclusions more or less in the end. People have tended to focus a lot on differences in the past whereas I think this shows that we have a lot more in common than we were aware of before (Rob, teacher).

The values and the vision were being developed concurrently and once the values were agreed, the vision could be finalised. The results were captured visually (Figure 4). The pedagogical framework was a very significant creation for Newlyn – capturing collective aspiration underpinned by values made explicit. A long list of pedagogical principles were subsequently drawn out of the framework – some already in place, others currently being addressed and the remainder a focus for future pedagogical development.

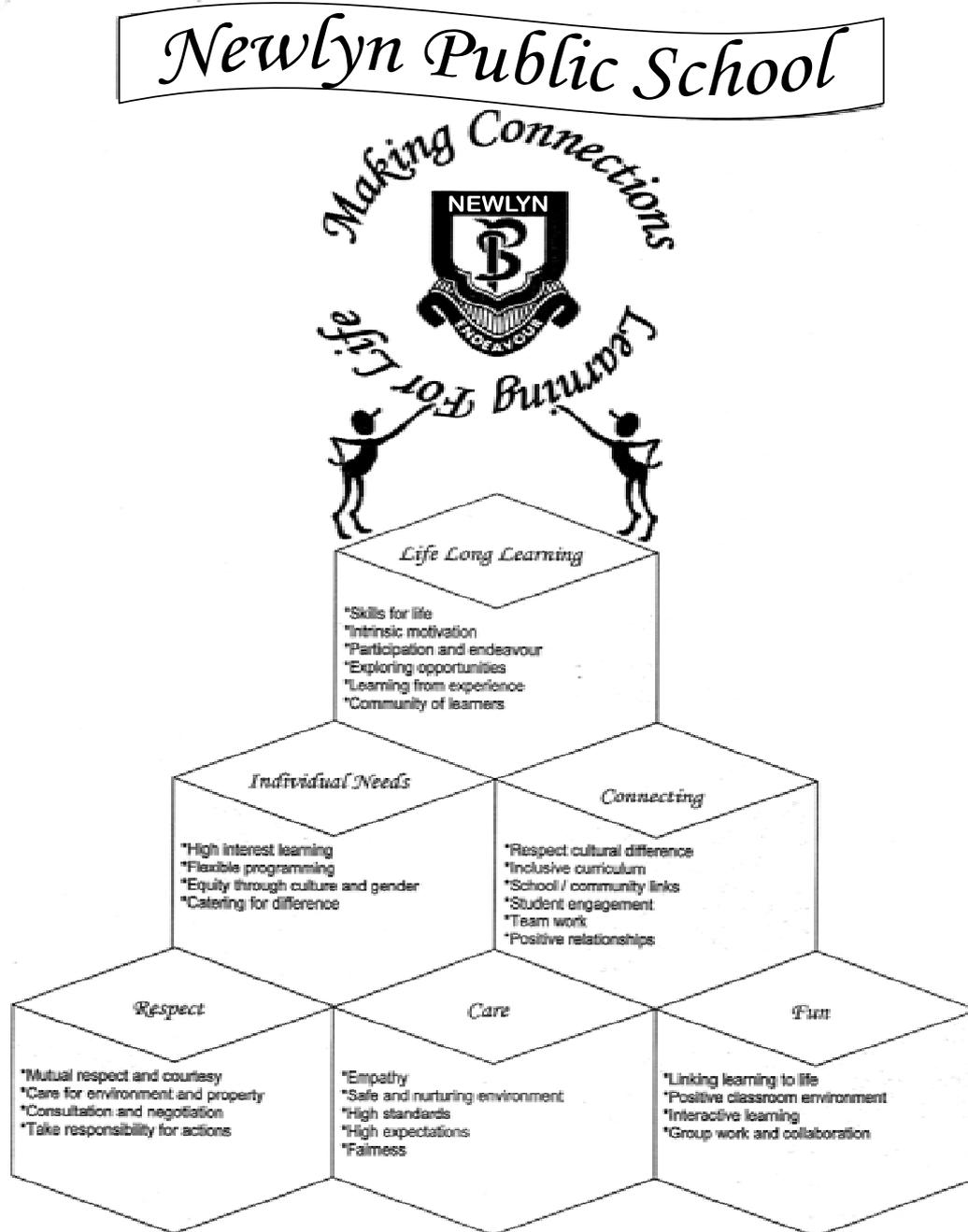
To bring the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy to life and embed them in action, a number of key structures needed to be in place. The daily literacy and numeracy blocks were already a feature of the school. The effects of these were reinforced by achievement targets that had been set for each year level or Stage. The Stage Teams also worked closely together, planning and providing mutual support. Perhaps the most significant changes arose from ongoing engagement of the IDEAS Management Team. Beginning as a group of four, this Team grew into a team of eighteen or so teachers. Membership and attendance at ISMT meetings was optional and the professional conversations intense.

At the IDEAS meetings we sit down, we talk about 'where to next' and 'why'? and we work through that process ourselves so by the time we've made a decision about what we are doing next, the people who are at that meeting can all very clearly articulate why is it that we want to go in that direction. (Nikki)

[The conversation at IDEAS meetings] is very free flowing, ideas are bounced around You are empowered in those meetings and you have an opinion and it's valid and respected and there is no blame (Rob, teacher).

Figure 4: The Newlyn Pedagogical Framework.

(Source: Newlyn Public School, 2003)



I feel really open with the IDEAS Committee - I think I am more trusting in that group and more confident to talk. And it's everyone from all different Stages (school wide) (Sue, teacher).

The IDEAS committee drives the school now – that it probably one of the biggest things, everyone is a stakeholder in what they do and that is fantastic (teacher)

This highly democratic group (open to all who wished to join) worked with the whole staff, driving the *ideas* process. By the beginning of 2004 this team (while still IDEAS in one sense) had become the Teaching and Learning Committee responsible for all Curriculum directions and for the professional development of teachers. This change was made to bring coherence to the curriculum and to professional learning.

I think the biggest benefit of IDEAS is going to be when we've brought together all the committees into one IDEAS committee and from there it's a whole school focus and there is no fragmentation (Matthew, teacher).

Emerging Outcomes from IDEAS

Even at this early stage of involvement with IDEAS, significant aspects of building capacity for ongoing improvement are emerging. The following are the most explicit:

a. The Development of improved professional relationships – a culture based on Inclusivity

There is a very strong sense of purpose and shared responsibility for the continuation of IDEAS processes in the school and those involved in the IDEAS Team in 2003 are playing a significant role in embedding and sustaining the ways of working they created.

Mentoring and Induction

The positive professional relations and shared understandings developed through engagement in IDEAS were particularly important at the start of 2004 when 12 new teachers came into the school. While these teachers were formally mentored and comprehensive information was provided on the 'Newlyn way' – the continuing teachers are also playing a significant role being 'an open book' to the new staff, guiding them and sharing understandings to 'bring them up to speed with how we do things here' – a phrase heard time and time again. This induction of new staff continues in staffroom conversations, at Stage Team meetings and in staff meetings. It permeates the school. The focus is on the positive

We had an induction program (for new staff members) during the holidays and I was really surprised to see some of the staff that were there. They didn't have to be there – they came to lend a hand. We are in it together and basically I think there is also the thought in this (the vision/values) that what affects my class also indirectly affects other people's classes as well (teacher).

Including students

Relationships between teachers and student have also improved – the current focus on improving student engagement along with high expectations and positive, caring relationships has resulted in a calmer, more focused school with fewer behaviour problems. The students, too, have been brought into the loop through the formation of an IDEAS Student Management Team. The *Making Connections: Learning for Life* vision was launched by the students at a special assembly having been 'translated' into "kid speak" by the older students.

Even as young as Year 5 and Year 6 – kids needs to understand. And when we talk about kids making choices, I think it is not only about the choices they make in terms of the work that they do – but they make choices about the amount of effort that they are going to put in and relating that to their futures (Nikki).

The students are being helped to make connections to the future and to understand that their current engagement in learning has an impact of their futures. Choices they make now will significantly influences choices that may be available in the future.

The students are also being brought into the loop through the creation of the IDEAS Student Management Team. This has been established

...to reflect on how what we do in the school affects the students. The individual needs, respect and connecting is going to be a lot stronger with this IDEAS student committee – because will actually drive it and they'll be stake holders in the school (Matthew, teacher).

b. Heightened engagement through collective responsibility -

One of the most clearly observable changes at Newlyn is the broad based decision making. The depth of the professional conversations in the large (and fluid) IDEAS Team (now the Teaching and learning Committee) has helped to create an environment of trust and mutual respect – along with growing group confidence about solving problems and making decisions. The decisions being made by the group relate to pedagogy, to curriculum and to professional learning.

It's nice to be a classroom teacher but be in a position where you can have an influence on what the whole school is going to do rather than the 'top' telling you what to do. It is going 'this is what we want' and everyone discussing it. That's new for me (Sue, teacher).

The IDEAS meetings and the project. – that really was developing positive and caring relationships for the staff. When you have a meeting you feel that you know the boss a bit better and you know your co-workers a bit better and you know they have got that similar goal – it is not like everyone is in their own separate little pigeon hole that they work in (Rob, Teacher).

c. Building a distinctive school

Newlyn has generated a unique identity. The creation of the pedagogical framework involved lengthy consideration of shared values, the desired future and aligned pedagogical principles. This process brought about significant cultural change and has generated new perceptions of school identity. Once developed, the pedagogical framework represents shared aspirations and understandings made explicit. It also provides a scaffold for further professional learning and meaning making. It is *living* in the school.

This IDEAS stuff has become Newlyn. It is our own style, this is how we do stuff. We have set up support structures – and it basically puts a scaffold around for teachers to build off and they so they really just kind of fit into it (Megan, teacher).

I think (the vision and values) have just made what we are on about more explicit – because we have thought about it... That piece of paper doesn't mean anything unless to actually do it. You have got to live it (Mark, teacher).

d. Sharing the Leadership

There are clear indications that leadership capacity has developed in the school. The Principal while 100% supportive of IDEAS, stepped back from the process enabling the middle managers to work with the whole staff. The teachers feel empowered and increasingly confident about making decisions related to their work. The systems in place and the professional culture which has developed bring coherence to school operation. The students are also being brought into the leadership 'loops'.

Cameo 2 Laurelvale State School

Laurelvale State School is a primary school located in Regional Queensland, Australia. The school opened in 1955 and today serves over 600 students aged 5 – 12 years, has 33 long serving, experienced class and specialist teachers. The school has been perceived as a traditional school, both in terms of structure (mainly single classrooms) and in terms of the approach to leadership and, organisation, decision making and curriculum. Recent changes in demographics have seen enrolments stabilise, some significant changing enrolment patterns related to an increasing transient population within the local area. The school has a proud history of achievements in academic, sporting and cultural spheres.

In the late 1990's, the school professional community had dealt with an upturn in the number and seriousness of behaviour related incidents through an introduction of a school wide method of behaviour management called the Responsible Thinking Process. Such was the commitment towards this move that staff members gave up weekends for training in the new process. Regular reviews have suggested that this approach remains a positive one for students, parents and staff. By 2001 the school was facing other challenges, namely declining academic performance:

Over a period of years, the Year Two Net, Year Five and Seven Test results, while showing good progress in reading also indicated room for development in the area of Writing, across the three Year levels tested. Internal Benchmarking of students also indicated oral reading skills were ahead of student comprehension skills (Jenny, the IDEAS School Facilitator).

Taking account of this data led the Laurelvale community to consider whether or not the same success experienced through the implementation of the Responsible Thinking Process, might also be possible in the areas of teaching and learning. Would a more consistent approach in both of these areas provide a better learning environment (and ultimately better outcomes) for students? It was this consideration that ultimately led us to involvement in the IDEAS project.

In essence, what we were looking for was a vehicle for school renewal. After consultation with the school community we decided to go with IDEAS –in March 2001 we began the journey (Steven. the Principal).

The school based Facilitator, Jenny, selected because of her sound knowledge of and interest in curriculum matters, her role as literacy leader in the school and her position

as teacher librarian, enabling her to influence and support all year levels. The IDEAS management team (ISMT), included the Principal and 12 self nominated staff. In 2003 the ISMT reported on what they have achieved over the period of engagement with the project.

Figure 5 Laurelvale Journey



The Vision and Schoolwide Pedagogy

The vision, and their understanding of school wide, contextualised pedagogy:



Vision Statement:

**Together we
Achieve the
Extraordinary**



TOGETHER

*We Co-operate
We Communicate
We Support*

***We* ACHIEVE**

*We are ALL learners
We are Responsible
We are Adaptable*

***the* EXTRAORDINARY**

*We Take risks
We Celebrate success
We Strive for excellence*

was *actioned* to address the concerns that were raised prior to IDEAS and also were reported in the schools Diagnostic Inventory result. In 2001, the school’s diagnostic inventory had supported the perception that it was already a successful school:

The School Report

The DI results made it clear that Laurelvale was strongly supported by all three stakeholder groups – staff, parents, students – and was widely regarded as achieving very sound outcomes for students. In essence, Laurelvale was a very good school by any standards. But concerns were also identified. The major areas of concern were as follows:

1. The lack of a vision that provided the school community with inspiration and direction.
2. Teachers’ concern that school planning processes were not sufficiently inclusive.
3. A shared concern of students and teachers that physical infrastructures were inhibiting effective teaching and learning.
4. The lack of a shared approach to teaching and learning –a schoolwide pedagogy.

In 2003 the DI for Staff items indicated a significant movement, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 Comparative DI Results, 2001 - 2003

| ITEMS | 2001 Mean | 2003 Mean |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| <i>Outcomes</i> | | |
| Critique of practice occurs through teacher dialogue | 3.59 | 3.83 |
| Consistency exists in vision/community/pedagogy | 3.36 | 3.76 |
| Students’ achievements show evidence of vision | 3.57 | 3.83 |
| <i>Strategic Foundations</i> | | |
| An inspiration vision guides school practice | 3.49 | 3.98 |
| Resource planning begins with consideration of T&L | 3.75 | 4.05 |
| <i>Cohesive Community</i> | | |
| Broad input occurs in planning processes | 2.97 | 3.41 |
| Examination of school processes precedes blaming | 3.63 | 3.89 |
| <i>Three-Dimensional Pedagogy</i> | | |
| An agreed definition of excellence in teaching exists | 3.33 | 3.85 |
| Systematic examination of teaching practices takes place | 3.38 | 3.72 |
| Teaching is grounded in current theory | 3.60 | 3.86 |
| Successful pedagogy is celebrated | 3.50 | 3.93 |
| <i>Professional Supports</i> | | |
| Teachers learn from each others’ successful practices | 3.33 | 3.78 |

A teacher focus group reported the impact of IDEAS, it:

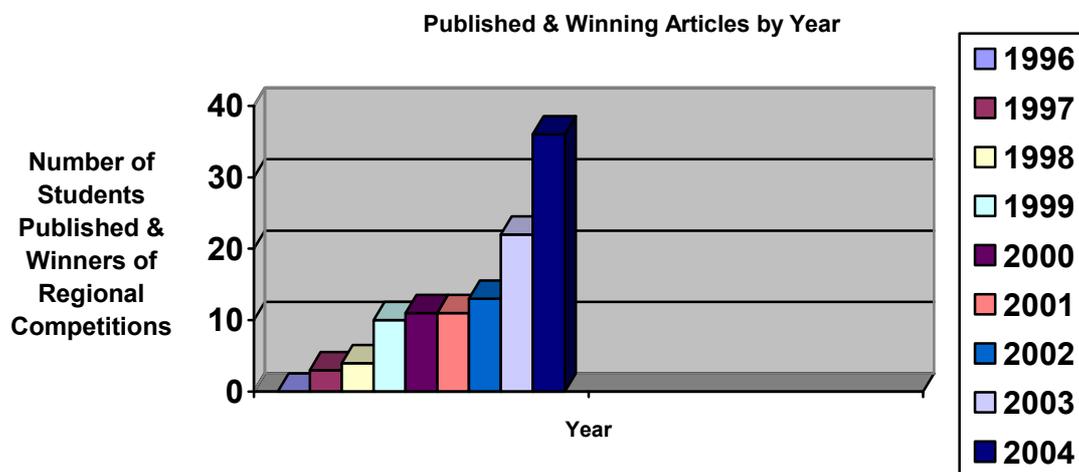
- provided a focus and framework for curriculum change
- provided a new focus on leadership - Strategic Leadership as well as Parallel ‘Teacher’ Leadership
- enabled the development of a new ethos developed and characterised by:- Risk Taking
- the created a ISMT as a strong feature of school leadership, constant motivation,
- has enabled teachers to be in control of our own destiny, teacher empowerment,
- created Collaboration, Vision and Schoolwide Pedagogy underpinning the school philosophy and directing key decision making about pedagogy, curriculum and Professional Development.

What these data indicate is a professional community that has become more focussed in its work, more collaborative in its relationships and more aware of the contributions of its members, including non-teaching staff. A very high level of support exists for the school amongst all three stakeholder groups – parents, staff and students. At the organisational and professional levels of the school, it can be concluded Laurelvale was a good school in 2001 but became an outstanding school as a result of processes undertaken by its staff in association with IDEAS.

What then has this capacity enabled teachers to achieve in regards to student learning outcomes?

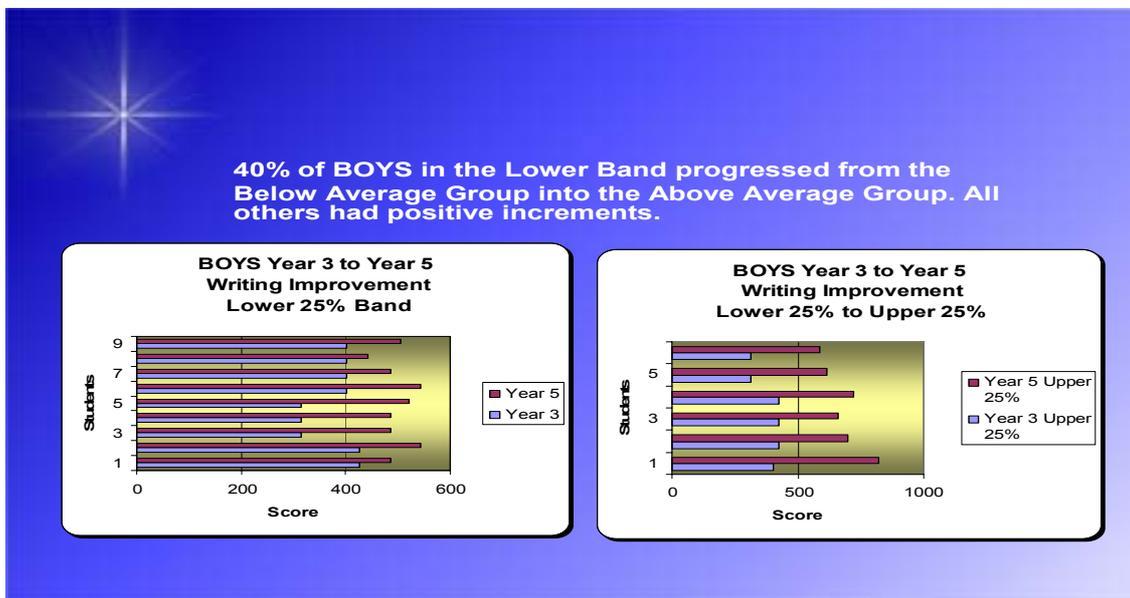
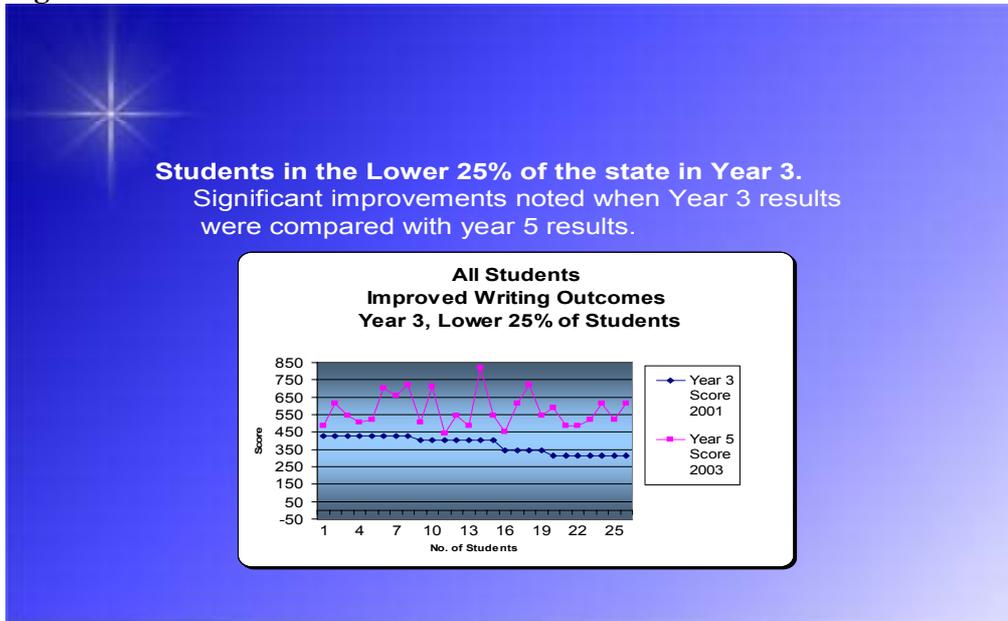
In October, 2003 we decided to measure the impacts of our two-year involvement with the IDEAS Project. Apart from the re-administration of the Diagnostic Inventory we implemented a series of strategies to measure the effects of the pedagogical practices that we had generated through our SWP in relation to the introduced Literacy Program.

Figure 6. Literacy Success



Other achievements included many awards for writing, such as a District finalist in the 2003 OZ writer's competition, a National Award for Literacy Writing through the school and Kids get Published; a regional finalist in the Nestle Write Around Australia Competition; and ABC featured Young Authors. The 2003 State-wide standardised testing also demonstrated significant improvement in writing.

Figure 7: State-Wide Data



Interviews across the school and with various community members indicated the following demonstrated outcomes:

- a. IDEAS provided a framework, direction and process for school renewal

- b. teachers are partners in Leadership and decision making – they have become the curriculum and pedagogical leaders
- c. teachers use professional conversation skills to effectively discuss student learning; teacher practice and pedagogy; and to solve difficult issues
- d. teachers are becoming more solution orientated rather than problem orientated
- e. elevated levels of confidence, sharing dialogue and motivation
- f. staff see systems imperatives easily integrated
- g. the whole school community has a clear vision of where we are headed and that our aim is to improve student outcomes
- h. Professional development is meaningful, easily transferred, generated from within, easily transferred to pedagogy and sustained
- g. often use ‘in school’ expertise and any outside experts must demonstrate how their particular ‘package’ can be contextualized
- h. the ISMT and the principal use data for ongoing school improvement:

Current data indicates that while the lower end of student performances have improved, the more gifted have not enhanced their outcomes to the same extent. Other challenges are improvement in higher order thinking skills and IT integration (Jenny, the IDEAS Facilitator).

Some reported elements of the IDEAS process that ensured success and sustainability

1. Data: that the school-level data that are collected as part of the IDEAS Project, encompassing Diagnostic Inventory results and relevant student achievement data, provide an excellent basis for the professional community of a school to continuously assess its progress towards futuristic goals.
2. Engagement in IDEAS has the potential to create enhanced synchronisation and alignment between a school’s critical elements - particularly the school’s vision, formal processes of community and professional input, curricula and teachers’ pedagogical beliefs and practices.
3. Essential elements in Laurelvale’s Journey – have been:

- a. The visioning activity:

Activities we undertook to move towards our Vision probably provided some of the most frustrating times in our journey. It seemed that the overwhelming majority of people recognized the need for a shared vision and were prepared to contribute. Despite this, we struggled to reach consensus. Luckily, we spent a great deal of time

on the importance of the vision statement and the necessity for the vision statement to relate to teaching and learning. This reinforced the need for the vision statement to have meaning for students, for parents and for school staff and provided a good scaffold for discussions with all of these groups.

We were able to identify the sorts of things that were important to us as a school community, including the importance of working together, achievement for all students and the importance of building a culture that strives for excellence. However, a number of statements appealed to different members of the school community. We ended up with a short list of preferred statements and examined these in an ISMT meeting, keeping in mind the areas of importance above. Finally, by the end of August 2001, the vision statement was finalized and it is still serving us well as our journey continues (ISMT report).

b. Creating our SWP – the continued building of a capacity to work together:

Following the adoption of our vision statement, we turned our attention to the development of our Schoolwide Pedagogy. We unpacked the vision statement in an activity that entailed looking at what the vision statement might mean for staff, for parents and for students. We also discussed what professional development might assist us in moving towards our Schoolwide Pedagogy. This led us to a decision to focus on higher order thinking skills and the need for a school wide approach to the teaching of writing. Staff members also considered an inventory of student comments on what makes a successful learning experience (ISMT Report).

Activities at staff meetings supported the embedding of this vision statement and planning for the future (Jenny).

c. Professional Conversation Strategies.

The ISMT saw skilful discussion and focused conversation as important as this skill they believed would provide the staff with a greater ability to have the important discussions about teaching and learning.

It would also hopefully encourage openness and teamwork, build trust, and help us move in a positive direction (Sally, an ISMT member).

Skilful Discussion on the topic “Writing in our School”, and a Focused Conversation on the topic “Reviewing the Responsible Thinking Process” provided us with great topics for professional conversations, they also allowed us to identify potential actions for our school in both of these areas. In this way, those involved in the discussions were able to see some benefit from the process (Jenny).

d. Dealing with the Concrete – actioning our Vision and SWP through a Focus on Literacy

Writing had been an area of concern for the school community for several years. This, combined with the systems requirement that every school develop a literacy strategy, prompted us to continue the search for literacy solutions. The actual workshop activity on the day was about delving further into our vision statement by

identifying the productive partnerships that were existing or possible in our school, what sort of student outcomes we might need to focus on and just what 'extraordinary' might mean for our school. Responses were recorded and collated.

The ISMT ran a meeting focusing on what Schoolwide Pedagogy meant and how it related to teachers' beliefs about teaching – their own personal pedagogy. We also planned a similar session for the staff meeting which was to follow. We revisited the wider context of the ideas process and the ongoing need for positivity. We discussed possible ways to mentor and to share information. We undertook a focused conversation on linking school-wide pedagogy to personal pedagogy.

As the Literacy initiative unfolded – we also sought feedback at staff meetings from teachers who were trialling the Literacy Cycle in their classrooms. These early discussions would lead to what we call 'staff meeting snapshots'. These snapshots would provide teachers with an opportunity to share what was working in their rooms. Teachers also began keeping work samples to show growth of children's writing. This practice has been continued to this day (Jenny).

The transposition of school wide pedagogical principles into the practices of individual teachers requires considerable time and allowance for experimentation as well as ongoing collegial and expert support.

e. Building of a newfound confidence and new ways of working –

The principal reflected on aspects of a growing confidence by himself and the staff as the creation of a simple but inspirational vision has nurtured a sense of pride and identity in the teaching staff in particular.

Our vision has been important to our success. People have come to accept that you can do extraordinary things without anxiety if you go about it the right way. The professional development activities, the conferences and breakfasts show teachers that developmental work can be fun, can be relaxing, not tedious. Also, as a school we are now able to say, "If a new imperative from outside doesn't fit, abandon it. That has helped us get a sense of ownership" (Steven, the Principal).

f. Changing the way we work -

Reflections from the Laurelvale community indicate that they have changed. The following comments come from the ISMT:

A critical mass of us have created new images and symbols that have changed how we think of ourselves.

IDEAS taught me that trying to talk about things can make things better.

The ISMT became a sorting strategy before staff meetings. Staff meetings have become forums for sharing successes.

The use of data (student literacy achievement) has enabled the Facilitator, principal and SMT to search for enhanced coherence in the school and to speak with authority about their work. It has also served to provide some necessary cautions;

Parallel leadership has been a constant feature of the Laurelvale IDEAS Project. The principal's role has been classic metastrategy. Teacher leadership has taken a range of forms, but has featured the Facilitator and ISMT members most particularly.

Conclusion.

Newlyn Public and Laurelvale State have become remarkable places. Both schools are in the process of sustaining what they have created – the capacity to achieve goals, maintain an aligned organisation that reflects ongoing and unrelenting demands for change and a clear sense of identity, that is, a clear sense of “*who we are*”. What then is this capacity that has been created – what is inside the black box of school improvement?

From similar case studies as outlined above, the researchers at the LRI developed a conceptual understanding of these processes as illustrated in Figure 3. As illustrated in the cameos, the involvement in a whole school revitalisation project enables a school to build capacity for ongoing school improvement. The research has enabled a clear articulation of capacity building that centres on enabling processes than enhance and transform the school as an organisation. These processes enable:

- heightened engagement – teacher and student motivation and renewal of classrooms

- transformation of organisational images and expectations

- creation of consistency across the organisation - alignment

These transformative processes create a change in the school cultural context:

- Creates a distinctive school

- Moves teaching from an individual to a collective activity

- Creates a new image of teacher professionalism - teachers who work in three dimensions and contribute to the leadership capacity through a mutualistic relationship with the principal.

These transformative processes are based on professional inquiry – inquiry that engages the professional community in a creative process, that is, collective thinking and imagining a preferred future.

The research also illuminates that it is the reconceptualisation of leadership that facilitate these processes, namely parallelism. It is through mutalism, a shared sense of purpose and an allowance for individual expression that a creative leadership resource has enabled the development of a highly responsive and contextualised school organisation – a place that makes a difference or excellence in outcomes for the stakeholders within.

These schools are very different in many ways – but in both cases engaging in the *ideas* process has brought about significant change. Context had influenced the particulars of the IDEAS journey but in both instances there is that sense of commitment to collectively creating a better future.

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