

## **PARALLELISM: CREATING MULTIPLE FORMS OF LEADERSHIP.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports on the emerging forms of parallelism in different cultural contexts. In particular, it explores the dynamics of leadership within school (principal and teachers; teachers and students); school and parent community; and school and broader community during a whole school improvement process. The paper explores how the emergence of multiple forms of leadership may be linked with the school's cultural context.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Frequent calls for schools to respond to needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners through the creation of *Future Schools* (Beare, 2001) or *Re-imagination* (Caldwell, 2005) require schools to engage in creative (Drucker, 1994) transforming processes which result in an organisation wide reimagining processes (Morgan, 2006). This paper reports a whole school revitalisation process IDEAS – Innovating Design for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (Andrews, et al. 2004) that engages school communities in a whole school commitment to developing a future orientation for their school community.

Schools engaging in whole school change processes encounter local contextual challenges that ensure that their change journey is unique to their context. This paper reports on schools experiences with the IDEAS Project, in particular, it explores the dynamics of leadership (Parallelism) within school (principal and teachers; teachers and students); school and parent community; and school and broader community during a whole school improvement process. The paper explores how the emergence of multiple forms of leadership may be linked with the school's cultural context.

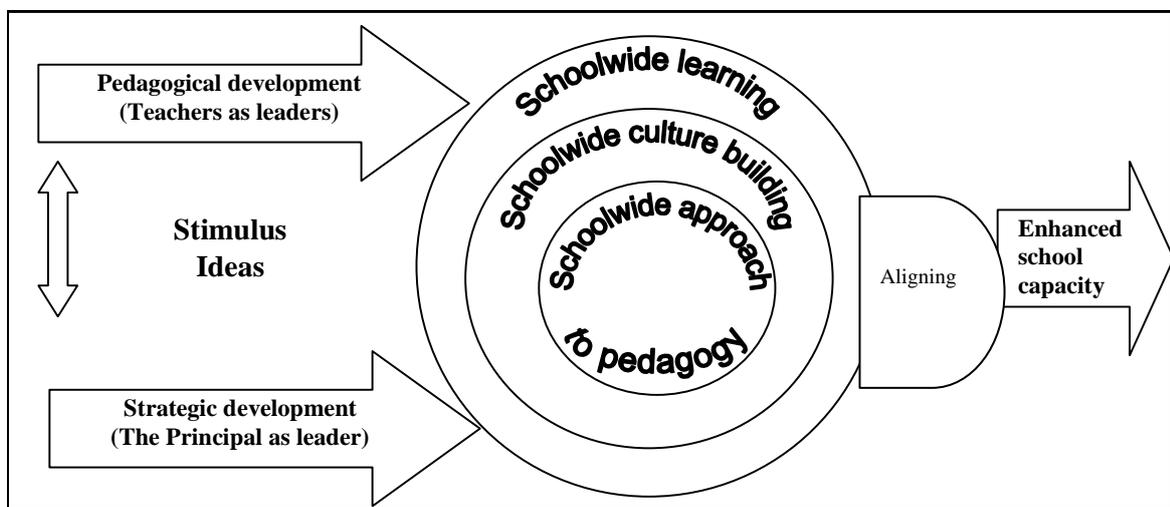
## **WHOLE SCHOOL REVITALISATION**

IDEAS began in early 1977 as the result of dialogue between Department of Education and the Arts, Queensland, Australia and the University of Southern Queensland's Leadership Research Institute (LRI), Toowoomba, Australia. The LRI research team based at the University in Toowoomba, have worked with over 180 schools in Queensland as well as State Schools in Victoria and Western Australia; Catholic Education schools in Canberra and Sydney; and three schools in Singapore. In 2003, at the invitation of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Technology, IDEAS was successfully trialled in schools in NSW, Canberra and Western Australia. The report provides case study evidence of school groups improving their local school communities in a sustainable way (Chesterton & Duignan, 2004).

IDEAS is a whole school revitalisation project that provides schools with tools and processes that enable each school to build its own distinctiveness. The image of a preferred future is based on a Vision developed from a shared sense of purpose and a focus on the work of

teachers through the development of a schoolwide approach to pedagogy. The IDEAS underpinning conceptual framework is informed by the Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002b) model that reflects an understanding of processes that enable school improvement (refer figure 1).

**Figure 1: Processes that enable school Improvement**



Crowther, et al. 2002b, p.44.

Figure one illustrates how the key concepts IDEAS, namely,

- a. An image of a successful school – the Research-Based Framework;
- b. A process of revitalisation – the *ideas* process, and
- c. A leadership model, Parallelism – the mutualistic relationship between the Principal (the Meta-strategic Leader) and Teacher Leaders who share a common purpose and goal (s) for the school community.

are linked. It is through parallel leadership, the three school based processes (school wide professional learning, school wide culture building and the development of a school wide

approach to pedagogy -schoolwide pedagogy (SWP)) can be activated and integrated (Andrews & Crowther, 2002).

### **The *ideas* process**

The IDEAS process used by schools (*ideas* process) is a process of professional inquiry. It provides schools with a school-based implementation strategy that encompasses five conceptually linked phases: *initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning and sustaining*, which usually takes about two to three years to work through in a school setting. Of central importance in most schools is development of a distinctive school vision and an associated schoolwide pedagogy (SWP). The *ideas* process requires the establishment of an internal facilitator(s) and an IDEAS school management team (ISMT) with the assistance of external facilitator support (Crowther et al, 2002a).

IDEAS manifests a spirit that is exemplified in its five operational principles –

- teachers are the key to successful school revitalisation;
- professional learning is best thought of as a shared collegial process within each individual school;
- a “no blame” mindset should permeate organisational problem-solving ;
- a “success breeds success” approach should guide teachers’ analyses of their professional practices ;
- the alignment of school processes is a collective school responsibility.

The observance of these five principles while using *ideas* process for revitalisation provides a basis for educational professionals to create renewed purpose and revitalised practices in their workplaces.

## **Parallel Leadership: the IDEAS Leadership Paradigm.**

The conceptualisation of educational leadership as ‘parallelism’ recognises the sophistication of today’s teaching profession and also reflects the uniqueness of today’s schools as learning organisations. It encourages a particular relatedness between teacher leaders and administrator leaders that enables the capacity of schools to create a new and preferred future direction for the school community. The result takes the form of what Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) have called enhanced *organisational capacity* and what some other researchers have called *value-addedness* (Hargreaves, 1999).

Parallelism has three distinct characteristics: mutualism, sense of shared purpose and allowance for individual expression. The first characteristic, mutualism, takes the form of mutual trust and respect and usually manifests itself in the acceptance by each party of the responsibilities and expertise that are associated with the role of the other. The second characteristic, a sense of shared purpose, is an expression of shared values such as the integrity of teaching or the need for advocacy or social justice. This develops as transparent decision making, collaborative problems solving and positive communications. The third characteristic relates to the allowance of a significant degree of individual expression (and action) by respective leaders for each other. This manifests strong convictions and assertive capabilities as well as the capacity to accommodate values of other leaders and work collaboratively with them (Crowther, et al. 2002b).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The data used in this paper has been drawn from three sources:

- a. Australian Research Council SPIRT research conducted by Crowther and Andrews and reported as a series of Case Studies (Crowther & Andrews, 2003);
- b. A formal evaluation of IDEAS Project schools that engaged in a national trial of the IDEAS Project in 2002-3: *Evaluation of the National Trial of the IDEAS Project* by Paul Chesterton and Patrick Duignan (2004).
- c. Ongoing site based research by members of the LRI research team as they work with schools engaging in the IDEAS process (2003-2006)

Each research project has used Case Study research across multiple sites and collected data in the form of:

1. Artefacts – each school keeps an historical record of their INDEAS journey including meetings, outcomes of data and IDEAS presentations prepared to demonstrate reportable outcomes;
2. Interview data of key members of the school community (principals, teachers); and
3. Focus group sessions involving students, teachers and parents.

This extensive data base has been scanned for evidence of emerging understandings of leadership. Some of these outcomes, in particular that related to teacher leadership, have been published elsewhere (Andrews & Crowther, 2006) and will not be repeated in this paper. The 2006 paper explored the new world of teacher professionals and highlighted the work of teacher leaders. This paper will highlight the emerging relationships between the school and the broader community in particular, those relationships that are developed as school communities use processes of IDEAS school revitalisation to develop a “preferred future”. Data presentation takes the form of a series of cameos highlighting the case in hand.

## **CASE STUDIES: MULTIPLE FORMS OF LEADERSHIP.**

### **Parallelism - Principals and Teachers working with the broader community**

The first set of data presented illuminate the experiences of schools engaging with the IDEAS project where the *ideas* process engages the professional community along with the broader school community in processes of whole school renewal. Using the *ideas* process, the school community develop a distinct identity, a vision of a preferred future and a strong sense of shared purpose which enhances the professional capacity of teachers to improve school outcomes, namely, the learning of their students, relationships with the community, and the coherence of the school operation.

Cameos one and two illustrate how teachers and the principal, working together and building a strong link with the broader community have transformed the experiences of students and how they have contributed to transforming their communities. The cameos presented include diverse contexts, each facing different challenges in meeting the needs of learners in their communities.

#### **Cameo One**



**SHELLY ISLAND STATE SCHOOL, GULF OF  
CARPENTARIA, QUEENSLAND**

**NGANGKIRR (TOGETHER)**

From a two year supported engagement with IDEAS, the Shelly Island State School is developing a way forward with the community providing support, guidance and leadership. From the sharing of hopes and aspirations for their youth, and gathering ideas from staff students and community members, the community has and is actioning a shared vision. The creation of a new understanding has emerged as a result of leadership from both within and outside the school.

Making the connection with community came through the visioning process with the use of the 'turtle imagery'. The sea is an integral part of life on Shelly Island, with the turtle an important aspect of the traditional culture. The turtle image was already strong in the community – it is the symbol on the school motto, it appears regularly in children's art and in murals around the community. The school council had created the school compact based on the turtle imagery.

*Linking the school vision to the turtle was the means of engaging the community and making what we are trying to achieve, meaningful and relevant (The principal).*

Our Vision:

'THALDI, BANA MERRI' (Come and Listen)

COURAGE, CHOICE, CHALLENGE

The turtle demonstrates great courage to break through the sand nest it must work hard and not give up. The turtle makes a choice for the direction it will take on its life-long journey. Along the way, challenges will confront the turtle – the successful turtle will continue to face challenges throughout its life and make choices, learning with each new experience, but will not forget where it came from and will return to its homeland.

*People listen to the turtle story “Together we are making a difference” (a community member).*

Parallelism has manifested itself in this community through a mutualistic relationship between the principal and members of the broader community. It became obvious that making a difference in this community meant the boundaries of school and the broader community had to be redefined. The school community members (principal and teaching staff) believed that there was a need to build a connection between school and community as this was critical for the positive future of young people in this remote island indigenous community.

### **Cameo Two:**

#### **SHADY PARK STATE SCHOOL, BRISBANE AUSTRALIA.**

Through building school as a “*community place*” where fun and interest has been rediscovered, Shady Park State School community has made a commitment to leadership for renewal in the Shady Park community. This commitment requires the school through the Administration team, the teachers and all staff to engage closely with existing community groups, to lead and be part of community initiatives and to be a strong voice for the provision of services to and for the community.

*The development of the capacity of and motivation of people within the Shady Park is critical to improving the education outcomes for the students in our school. Our activities are designed to:*

- *Improve the quality and depth of relationships between people in our families and the community;*

- *Build relationships that are productive and are based on a common vision for Shady Park- a set of expectations, a set of shared values, and a sense of trust among all the people* (The principal).

Engaging with IDEAS has extended the work of community engagement into a focus on student opportunity and improving school outcomes. The school was recently acknowledged for its significant role through a Queensland State School Showcase ‘*Excellence in Leadership*’ award for its school renewal work with community.

The work of the Principal in particular has been crucial in building a strong relationship between the school and the broader community. Again in an area of disadvantage, blurring boundaries between school and community has been crucial to the school revitalisation process.

### **Parallelism - Redefining Leadership Teachers and Students.**

The second group of Cameos (three and four) illustrate how schools through the *ideas* process have created new relationships between principal and teachers and teachers and students. The motivation for both schools was the development of an engaging middle school for students who were becoming disengaged.

#### **Cameo Three:**

#### **Forestville State High School: Building a Middle School**

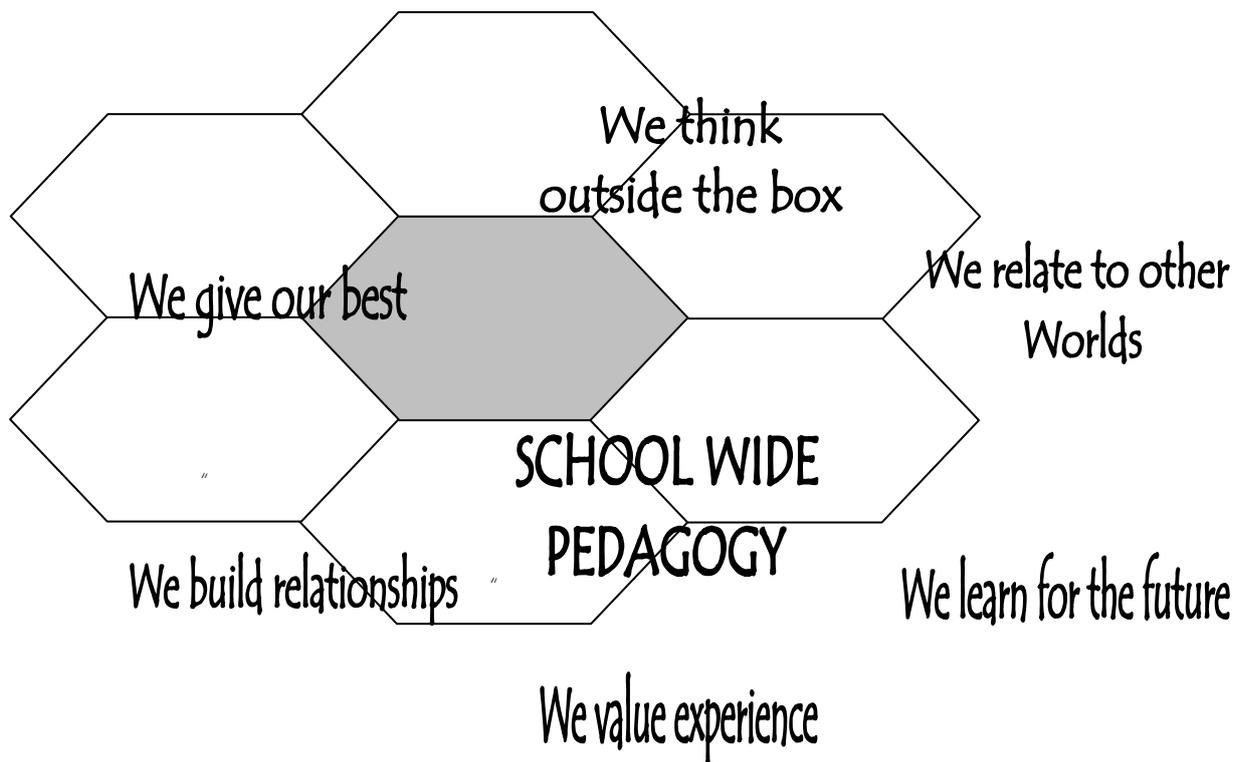
Forestville State High School (FSHS) is a large secondary school located on edge of a major city in South East Queensland. It was established in 1992 as a young school meeting the

needs of a large number of feeder primary schools in the area and had gained and enjoyed a favourable reputation in the community. However, the ensuing decade saw a change in socio-economic backgrounds from the traditional rural residential area to an increasing urban sprawl of residential low density housing and an increasing level of unemployment. These changes brought tensions and there was a need for the school community to take stock and build a new future.

The school used the IDEAS process to develop a new Vision and a School wide approach to teaching, learning and assessment (Schoolwide Pedagogy). The vision, ***Together we learn, individually we grow, Success for All*** emerged from the work of teacher leaders working with student, especially those in the middle years of schooling. The result was an engaging Schoolwide Pedagogy (SWP) that was underpinned by an explicit teaching value system based on *Trust; Fairness; Success; Community and Quality* (refer Figure 2).

Encouraged by dialogue with students about effective teaching and learning, Year 8 and 9 (12-14 year old students) teachers found that strong advocacy by the student body challenged teaching and learning practices and encouraged the staff to develop a new approach to curriculum, pedagogy and establish a middle schooling alliance linking initiatives in Year 8 and 9 to their numerous feeder primary schools.

**Figure 2: Schoolwide Pedagogy**



**Cameo Four**

Carnelly State High School, a small rural school, embarked on a Middle School program that was aimed at improving outcomes in the early high school years with a focus on improved pedagogy, cross-subject planning and teacher teams, social support and intellectual rigour. The teachers and students working together in the envisioning phase, created a new Vision – *Creating a future together* and the development of a School Wide Pedagogy (SWP).

The process of developing the Vision and the School Wide Pedagogy took over a year. Integral to the process was the involvement of a Student *IDEAS* Team (SIT) of Year 12 students who critiqued the work of the teachers and others and contributed many ideas to the

final shape and wording of the SWP. The SIT has continued this year as a much bigger group of year 11 and 12 students (from 11 in 2002 to 46 in 2003) who became involved in a number of projects, such as building partnerships with teachers, exploring the effect of learning styles in the classroom, producing a school *IDEAS* website and “spreading the message” of the Vision and SWP to the whole school. Students had become advocates for the life in classrooms for all students and continued to action a leadership role within the school community.

*One of their central concerns was to make the SWP an integral part of day-to-day classroom activity within the school and as a result, some began working with individual teachers to explore what could be done in particular classrooms. (English Teacher).*

This same teacher through dialogue with the year 9 class, the teacher developed a shared understanding with the students in regards to a pedagogy for year 9 that reflected the vision “creating futures together”. This statement:

*Good teaching and learning involves a variety of new and exciting ideas for classroom activities. Where possible, activities should be hands on, creative and set in different environments. At the beginning of a unit, students and teachers should set goals to be accomplished by the end of that unit. Where possible, students should be given choices because everyone has different interests and learning abilities. Students need to be respected and treated as equals (Year 9 Students).*

The outcome statement has enabled the teacher to redefine relationships with the students and enable the students to take on a leadership of learning role within the classroom.

*I wanted to give them greater control over their own learning and over what happened day to day in the classroom (Year 9 English teacher)*

**Parallelism: Principal and Teacher Leaders work together to make meaning for the Community.**

The final Cameo (Cameo Five) illustrates the importance of the principal and teacher leaders working together to ensure authenticity of pedagogical practices within a rural community. The focused practices, based on the work of teachers, enabled the principal to revitalise the relationships between the school and its community.

**Cameo Five**

St Agnes's Central School is located in a small rural community some distance from a larger inland city. The school has just on 250 students and 15 staff, catering for students from year 1 – year 10. The school had been beset by a number of difficult issues in recent years, with questions raised as to whether it should continue to exist. The Central Office decided to support a school redevelopment process – they appointed a new principal, started to refurbish the school and 'volunteered' the school for IDEAS.

The IDEAS report on the school's outcomes indicated a general lack of confidence in the school's purposefulness, outcomes and vitality and challenged the principal and professional community to find new ways to work together to create a new identity. Just one and a half years after commencing the IDEAS process Central Office carried out a school wide pedagogical review. The panel commented:

*The use of the IDEAS process, the development of the school vision statement and schoolwide pedagogical approach are profound evidence of effective school renewal and wide ranging cultural change at St Agnes's Central School ((Evaluation report - school artefact).*

In generating and adopting the vision, *Plant the Seed, Nurture the Growth, Celebrate the Harvest*, the school created a metaphor in which cultural meaning relating to St Agnes' agricultural community was recognised and celebrated. This enabled the principal to proceed with building close links with the community. It also enabled the staff to develop a set of schoolwide pedagogical principles that emphasised foundational knowledge (planting) enrichment activities (nurturing) and achievement of successful outcomes (harvesting).

The report also indicated:

*Leadership in the school has been distributed to allow teachers to view themselves as important in shaping the schools direction and values. This has been achieved through professional dialogue, cooperative learning procedures in staff meetings, continued collaborative consultation and shared decision-making (Evaluation report - school artefact).*

The staff engaged in numerous opportunities to explore their own individual pedagogical approaches in relation to the theme of *Plant the Seed, Nurture the Growth, Celebrate the Harvest*, with strong external expressions of support:

*The educational, spiritual, artistic, literary and intellectual identity of St Agnes's staff, students, parents and wider community are unequivocal and explicit to the cultural meaning of the school (Evaluation report -school artefact).*

## **SUMMARISING UNDERSTANDINGS FROM THE CAMEOS**

In each Cameo, the importance of the context and the consequent motivation of the Principal and teaching staff have had a significant impact on the development of school community initiatives using the IDEAS project. The enhanced outcomes reported by the school community have been a direct result of members of the school and the broader community taking on leadership roles during the revitalisation process. The emergence of these different leadership relationships has been an important feature of our understanding of the outcomes of the school revitalisation process.

In each case, the characteristics of parallelism (mutualism, sense of shared purpose and allowance for individual expression) have been evident. The development of a vision and schoolwide approach to pedagogy has been essential in the development of a sense of shared purpose – creating a future together. This ‘future’ has been created collaboratively by the community and leadership of the process has not been the province of the principal. The third characteristic has been crucial in each study, reflecting each individual being respected but demonstrating “strong convictions and assertive capabilities as well as the capacity to accommodate values of each other and together work collaboratively” (Crowther, et al. 2002b).

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The cameos presented in this paper have described emerging understandings of parallel leadership which have challenged the pre-existing conceptualisation of leadership for school improvement as outlined in Figure 1 (Crowther, et al. 2002b). As school, communities grapple with their particular challenges(s) for school improvement multiple forms of

leadership have emerged. New relationships have been build between principals and teachers; teachers and students; and school personnel and parents and the broader community. In essence the conceptualisation of leadership as an organisation-wide capacity to influence the life of the school community (parallelism) and the understanding of what that might mean in terms of relationships and role in the new revitalised school cannot be predicted and depending on the nature of the context, from our experience, the forms of parallelism have emerged in many different ways.

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