

University of Southern Queensland

The principal in a process of school revitalisation: a
metastrategic role

A dissertation submitted by

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Certification of Dissertation

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, even though I may have received assistance from others on style, presentation and language expression.

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Abstract

The educational literature has popularised models of school leadership such as Instructional, Transformational, Strategic, Educative, and Servant Leadership. Whilst valuable as ways of conceptualising leadership styles, worldviews, traits, roles and functions of individual principals, these models fall short of capturing the dynamic between the outcomes of leadership and the leadership process in contemporary school contexts.

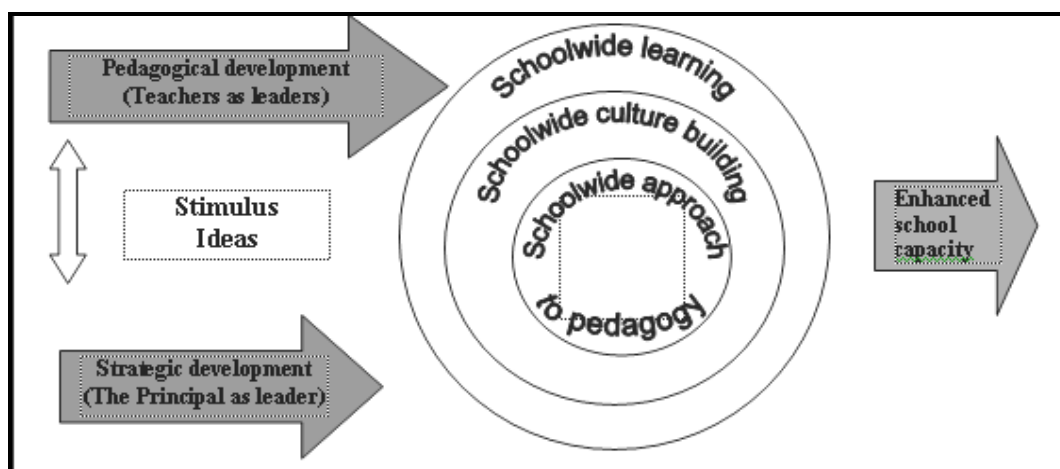
Distributed leadership theory is held by many to be more attuned to the post-industrial needs of organisations, and its influence on educational research has seen the emergence of new ways of comprehending leadership in schools. One influential example is ‘parallel leadership’, a derivative of distributed leadership that describes teachers as leaders of curriculum and pedagogy and principals as metastrategic leaders. This study looks specifically at the leadership processes of a small sample of principals in the process of school revitalisation titled *IDEAS* (Innovative Designs for Enhancing the Achievements of Schools).

A key motivation for this study was that the concept of ‘parallel leadership’ had been subjected to little serious critique. Uncertainty surrounded how principals in *IDEAS* schools conceptualised their leadership, and what impacts experience with the *IDEAS* Project has on conceptions of leadership. The purpose of this study was to tease out the meanings that a sample of principals gave to their highly complex role as principal, whilst engaging with the concept of ‘parallel leadership’ during their schools’ implementations of *IDEAS*. The Research Problem was stated as: What conceptions of

principal leadership arise out of a sample of principals' experiences with a process of school revitalisation that emphasises a distributed approach to school leadership?

The overarching inquiry took the form of a multi-case or collective case study and comprised four principals who had engaged with *IDEAS* over a period of at least two years. Data collection strategies included the in-depth interview, which was chosen as the primary method for informants to describe their perceptions of their leadership, together with concept mapping and a structured interview that was utilised to gain staff perceptions of informants' leadership. Methods of analysis involved detailed transcriptions of taped interviews and tools derived from the literature review that were used to code and categorise the texts of interviews.

Crowther et al. (2001) proposed the following Model of Successful School Revitalisation as a result of their research conducted under the auspices of the Australian Research Council and Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).



Source: (Crowther, Hann & McMaster 2001, p. 141)

First, the Model identifies principal leadership and teacher leadership as each having concrete meaning and significance and that success occurs through a mutual and respectful association. This relationship is captured by the authors in the new concept of ‘parallel leadership’. Second, the Model makes clear a view that effective school leadership impacts three school processes that are conceptualised as culture building, shared approach to pedagogy and schoolwide learning. Third, the Model proposes that through the enrichment and integration of these three processes school outcomes are enhanced.

This study focussed on the principal leadership aspect of ‘parallel leadership’ and resulted in a Model of Metastrategic Principal Leadership that conceptualises the intersection of principal leadership and the *ideas* process which Crowther et al. described as the Stimulus in **Figure 1.1**.

The present study thereby extends the definition of ‘parallel leadership’ by describing how principals contribute to transformations of leadership, learning, and pedagogy through three principal-led processes. The proposed Model of Metastrategic Principal Leadership suggests that when activated by a principal’s continuous professional learning the combination of the interactions of personal style (Personal), the process of revitalisation (Processual), and personal conceptualisation of role (Conceptual) result in principal-led processes that support successful school revitalisation. The three principal-led processes that were uncovered are described as re-imagining school leadership, support of organisation-wide learning, and management of meaning.

The researcher hopes the outcomes of the study will be of benefit to principals and teachers in the increasing numbers of schools now engaging with *IDEAS* across Australia and internationally. A further hope is that the present study's descriptions of new ways of comprehending leadership in schools might be of assistance to school practitioners seeking to move from traditional to distributed forms of leadership and also educational theorists who are working in the field of school improvement.

Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Band 11	Queensland Public schools are banded 5-11 in ascending order according to size and complexity
DETYA	Department of Education and Training and Youth Affairs
DI	Diagnostic Inventory
HOD	Head of Department
IBPP	International Best Practice Project
<i>ideas</i>	The process of school revitalisation
<i>IDEAS</i>	Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (The Project)
PL	Parallel leadership
PLF	Personal Leadership Framework
RBF	Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes
SWP	Schoolwide Pedagogy

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations	vii
Table of Contents.....	8
List of Tables	12
List of Tables	12
List of Figures.....	13
Chapter One: Introduction to the Study	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.1 Chapter overview	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
1.2 Background to the study.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
1.3 The Purpose and significance of the study	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
1.4 The Research Problem and Research Questions.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
1.5 Related design and methodology.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
1.6 Assumptions and limitations.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
1.7 Organisation of the thesis.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
1.8 Summary—Chapter One.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
Chapter Two: Literature review...	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.1 Introduction.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
2.2 The theoretical context for leadership in schools.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
2.2.1 School reform.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.2.2 The literature on re-thinking school leadership	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.2.3 New images of principal leadership	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.3 The IDEAS Project and ‘parallel leadership’	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
2.3.1 Background	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.3.2 The IDEAS Project.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.4 Leadership models.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
2.5 Three worldviews of educational leadership.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
2.6 Summary—Chapter Two	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

Chapter Three: Methodology **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

3.1 Introduction.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.2 Philosophical orientation of the study.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.3 Research design.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.3.1 Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.2 The Research Problem and Research Questions	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.3 The Research Strategy: Case Study.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.3.4 Selection of cases	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4 Research Method.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.4.1 Introduction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4.2 Data collection.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4.3 Data analysis	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.8 Pilot study.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.8.1 Pilot study data collection and analyses	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.8.2 Pilot study—conclusions and implications for the research study.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.9 Validity and reliability.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.9.1 Generalisability	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.9.2 Internal validity	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.9.3 Reliability	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.10 Ethical considerations.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.10.1 The researcher’s stance.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.10.2 Participants	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.11 Outcomes and significance of the study.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
3.12 Summary—Chapter Three	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

Chapter Four: Constructing Personal Leadership Frameworks**Error! Book**

4.1 Introduction.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.2 Informant 2—Construction of a Personal Leadership Framework.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.2.1 Informant 2 (Joan) Narrative re-construction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.2.2 Analysis of Joan’s story	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.2.3 Summary—Joan’s Personal Leadership Framework.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.3 Informant 3—Construction of a Personal Leadership Framework.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.3.1 Informant 3 (Rick)—Narrative re-construction.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.3.2 Analysis of Rick’s story	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.3.3 Summary—Rick’s Personal Leadership Framework	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.4 Informant 4—Construction of a Personal Leadership Framework.....	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
4.4.1 Informant 4 (Terry)—Narrative re-construction	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.4.2 Analysis of Terry’s story	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.4.3 Summary—Terry’s Personal Leadership Framework	Error! Bookmark not defined.
4.5 Findings—Research Question One	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>

Chapter Five: The key features of informants' implementations of IDEAS **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

- 5.1 Introduction.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 5.2 Informant 2.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 5.2.1 Informant 2—Key features of Joan's implementation of IDEAS*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 5.3 Informant 3.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 5.3.1 Informant 3—Key features of Rick's implementation of IDEAS*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 5.4 Informant 4.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 5.4.1 Informant 4—Key features of Terry's implementation of IDEAS*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 5.5 Conclusions—*Research Question two*.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Chapter Six: Uncovering the dynamics of the interplay between informants' Personal Leadership Frameworks and engagement with the *ideas* process **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

- 6.1 Introduction.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 6.2 Informant 2.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.2.1 Informant 2—Discussion of the dynamics of the interplay between Joan's PLF and her engagement with IDEAS—PART 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
 - 6.2.2 Informant 2—Summary of the dynamics of interplay PART 1*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.2.3 Informant 2—Concept map of principal leadership-PART 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.2.4 Informant 2—Summary of the dynamics of interplay PART 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 6.3 Informant 3.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.3.1 Informant 3—Discussion of the dynamics of the interplay between Rick's PLF and his engagement with IDEAS—PART 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
 - 6.3.2 Informant 3—Summary of the dynamics of interplay PART 1*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.3.3 Informant 3—Concept map of principal leadership-PART 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.3.4 Informant 3—Summary of the dynamics of interplay PART 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 6.4 Informant 4.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.4.1 Informant 4—Discussion of the dynamics of the interplay between Terry's PLF and his engagement with IDEAS—PART 1**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
 - 6.4.2 Informant 4—Summary of the dynamics of interplay PART 1*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.4.3 Informant 4—Concept map of principal leadership-PART 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.4.4 Informant 4—Summary of the dynamics of interplay PART 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
- 6.5 Pilot Study Informant*Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.5.1 Informant 1—Concept map of principal leadership**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
 - 6.5.2 Informant 1—Summary comment on concept map.....**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- 6.6 Conclusions—*Research Question Three**Error! Bookmark not defined.*
 - 6.6.1 The influence of Personal Leadership Frameworks**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
 - 6.6.2 Four key mindsets**Error! Bookmark not defined.**
 - 6.6.2 Three principal-led processes**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Chapter Seven: Uncovering a view of the principal in the successful implementation of IDEAS—metastrategic principal leadership **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

7.1 Introduction.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.2 Conclusions.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.2.1 Conclusion 1—A Model of Metastrategic Principal Leadership*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.2.2 Conclusion 2—The concept of ‘parallel leadership’ extended*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.2.3 Conclusion 3—Allowance for differing Personal Leadership Frameworks*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.2.4 Conclusion 4—IDEAS and transformation.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.3 Implications of the conclusions of the study.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.3.1 Implication 1*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.3.2 Implication 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.3.3 Implication 3*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.4 Proposals of further research.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

7.5 Final Statement.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

References..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Appendices..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Appendix A—Letter of invitation and informant consent*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix B—Researcher-generated Framework of Principal Leadership*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix C—Doherty’s Categorisation of the Sources of Influence on Principal’s Practice (2002)*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix D—Pilot Study transcription of taped interview 1.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix E—Pilot Study Interview 1 - Analysis of Text Using Doherty’s Categorisation of the Sources of Influence on Principal’s Practice*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix F—(Pilot Study) Profile of Leadership.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix G—Pilot Study Transcription of Interview 2*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix H—Pilot Study analysis of interview 2 using the Framework of Parallel Leadership*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix I—(Informant 2) analysis of text using Doherty’s Categorisation of the Sources of Influence on Principal’s Practice.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix J—Four Informants’ Profiles of Leadership*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix K—(Informant 2) Analysis of text using the Framework of Parallel Leadership*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix L—(Informant 2) Key Features of implementation of IDEAS ...*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix M—External feedback instrument.....*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix N—Summaries of external feedback on the leadership of each of the four informants*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

Appendix O—Summaries of three informants’ key features of implementation of IDEAS*Error! Bookmark not defined.*

List of Tables

	Page
Table 2.1	Summary—Framework of Parallel Leadership 40
Table 3.1	Characteristics of case sites and principals 72
Table 3.2	Sampling—Staff feedback survey 80
Table 4.1	Personal Leadership Framework Template 104
Table 4.2	Informant 2—Personal Leadership Framework 119
Table 4.3	Informant 3—Personal Leadership Framework 134
Table 4.4	Informant 4—Personal Leadership Framework 151
Table 4.5	Summary—Four Personal Leadership Frameworks 153
Table 5.1	Informant 2—Classification of the descriptors of Joan’s implementation of <i>IDEAS</i> 163
Table 5.2	Informant 3—Classification of the descriptors of Rick’s implementation of <i>IDEAS</i> 170
Table 5.3	Informant 4—Classification of the descriptors of Terry’s implementation of <i>IDEAS</i> 177
Table 5.4	Key features and foci of informants’ implementations of <i>IDEAS</i> 180
Table 6.1	Key features, foci, and mindsets of informants’ implementations of <i>IDEAS</i> 222
Table 7.2	A template for reflection on the principal’s role as a parallel leader 246

List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1.1	Crowther et al. Model of Successful School Revitalisation 2
Figure 2.1	The Research-based Framework 35
Figure 2.2	Framework of Principal Leadership—Partial 52
Figure 2.3	Framework of Principal Leadership—Complete 60
Figure 3.2	Overview of data collection and analysis 77
Figure 3.3	Pilot Study informant—concept map of principal leadership 88
Figure 6.1	Schema of the researcher’s interpretation of Research Question Three 181
Figure 6.2	Informant 2—schema of Research Question Three 183
Figure 6.3	Informant 2—concept map of principal leadership 189
Figure 6.4	Informant 3—schema of Research Question Three 195
Figure 6.5	Informant 3—concept map of principal leadership 201
Figure 6.6	Informant 4—schema of Research Question Three 206
Figure 6.7	Informant 4—concept map of principal leadership 212
Figure 6.8	Pilot study informant—concept map of principal leadership 216
Figure 7.1	Model of Metastrategic Principal Leadership 232