Great IDEAS:
Revitalising Teaching, Learning And Student Achievement

Senthu Jeyaraj, Kenneth Stott, David Ng, Bernice Lee & Swee Pei Lim
National Institute of Education, Singapore

Abstract
Many of us think we know what a really good principal is. We also think we know what student achievement is. But how does a good principal actually influence student achievement? In other words, how does it work? What is in the 'black box' – as Frank Crowther refers to it – between a good principal and student success? IDEAS attempts to explain what is in the 'black box'. Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (IDEAS) is a major contemporary innovation and contribution to school revitalisation and reform. The IDEAS project was conceptually developed and undertaken with extraordinary success in several schools in Australia, starting in the late 1990s. Since then, the project has been extended to some several hundred schools in Australia. In partnership with the Leadership Research Institute in Queensland and three pilot schools in Singapore, we are now exploring how the IDEAS framework can be adapted to the Singapore context. With its focus on parallel leadership and a schoolwide approach to teaching and learning, it has the potential to move our understanding of student achievement, and indeed reform and revitalisation – to new heights for Singapore schools. In this paper, we provide a basic explanation of the IDEAS framework and give a progress report on the exciting work in the three partner schools.

Introduction

Why do we need school revitalisation? The answer is simple - we are moving into a new, knowledge-based world of the 21st century, and it is quickly becoming clear that the industrial way of functioning in schools will no longer be sufficient in this information era. In light of this, education has taken on a 'new meaning' – one that emphasises the innovative application and integration of acquired knowledge. To ensure that schools are better able to respond to this change, school revitalisation is essential and one way to achieve this is through IDEAS.

IDEAS stands for Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (Crowther, 2002). It is a way of thinking about the improvement of schools that allows them to engage in journeys of self-discovery leading to sustained improvements in teaching and learning processes.

IDEAS

IDEAS is based on four essential components, all of which are major extensions of the educational reform literature. These components are: organisational alignment, the *ideas* process, 3-dimensional pedagogy and parallel leadership.

Organisational Alignment

Kaplan and Norton (1996) stated that for an organisation to be effective 'everyday operational activity and decisions need to align with long-term strategic objectives' (pg.5). Similarly, Murphy (1992) asserted that sustainable school improvement requires consistency and strong structural, symbolic and cultural linkages. On the basis that cohesion and synchronization is essential in school improvement, Crowther, Andrews, Dawson & Lewis (2001a) conceptualised a model of 'harmony' to provide schools with a starting point in generating an image of a high performing organisation. This model is referred to as The Research-based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes (RBF).

The RBF comprises five essential Contributory Elements:

- Strategic foundations – addresses values of the school and associated strategies which make those values explicit within the school and the wider community.
- Cohesive community – addresses the collaborative activity within the professional learning community and between the school and wider community, while respecting the value of individualism.
- 3-Dimensional pedagogy – The synthesis of authoritative, personal and schoolwide pedagogical practices.
- Infrastructural design – addresses the usage of time, space, technologies and curriculum frameworks.
- Professional support – addresses the internal and external opportunities for learning and creating new knowledge.

These five elements, when examined in depth by the professional community, generate new meaning for the school. In conducting this examination, the following school outcomes have been observed: enhanced student learning, school-community relations, creation of new knowledge within the professional community and the alignment of the contributory elements (Crowther et al., 2001a).
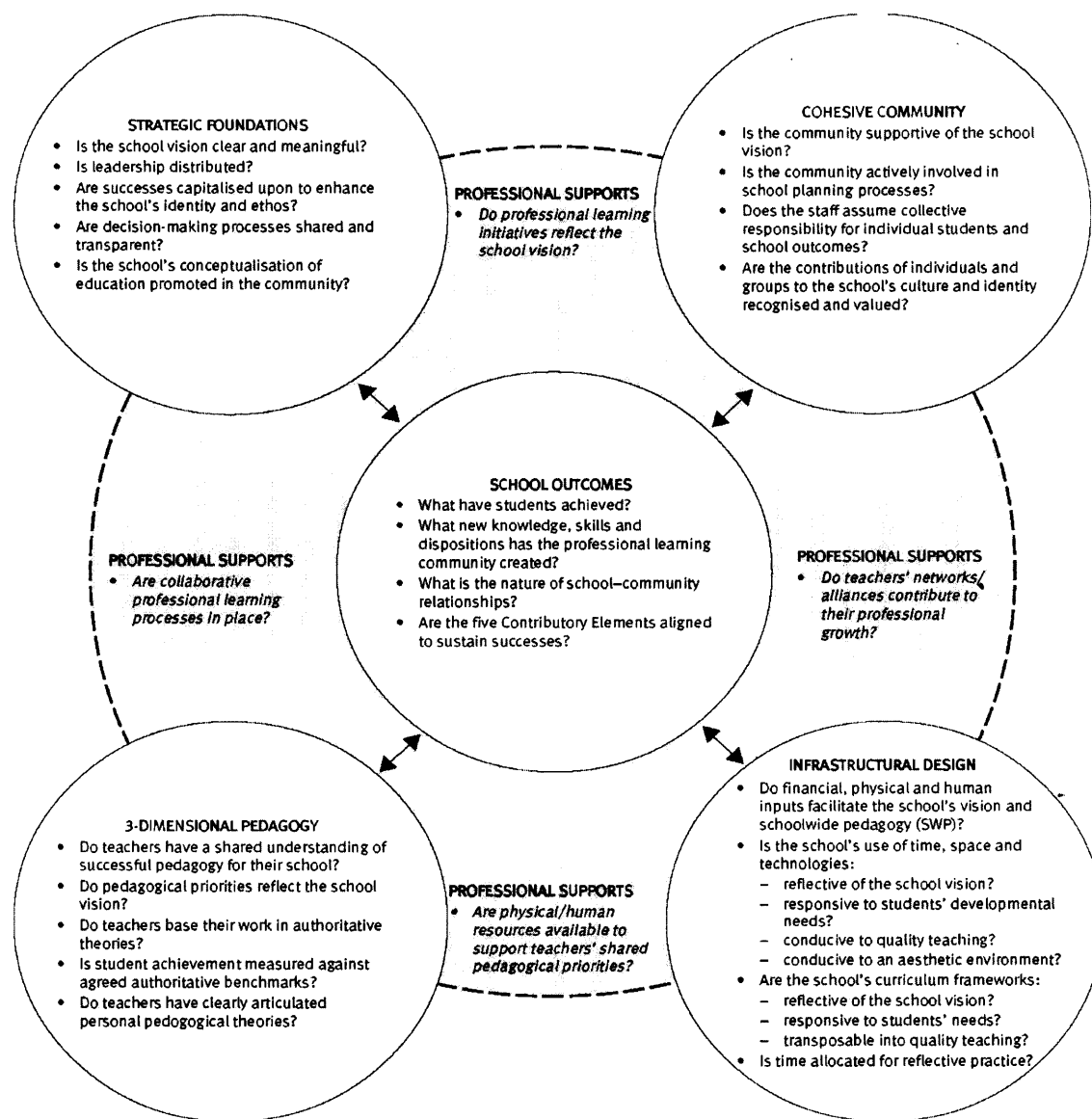
The *ideas* process

The *ideas* process engages the professional community in a 'collaborative' learning process, characterized by five phases linked in a conceptual sequence. In the *i*nitiating phase, a management team (MT) is formed and encouraged to commit to the principles of teacher leadership, collaborative learning, an attitude of 'no blame', the awareness that success breeds success and, with the principal's lead, being collectively responsible for aligning school processes and elements.

During the *d*iscovery stage, the school community collects information using the Diagnostic Inventory (based on the RBF) from teachers, students and parents in an attempt to ascertain the school's current successful practices and identifies areas of concern which the school seeks to improve. The gathered information is then utilised in the *e*nvisioning phase to engage the school community in collective discussion and reflection in the 'imagining of ideals or dreams that the school community may aspire to achieve' (Andrews et al., 2004, pg. 13). Upon reflection by the professional community of the

school's vision and successful teaching practices, this phase concludes with the conceptualisation of schoolwide pedagogy (SWP).

IDEAS essentials: The Research Based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes (Leadership Research Institute, 2002, cited in Andrews et al., 2004)

STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS
- Is the school vision clear and meaningful?
- Is leadership distributed?
- Are successes capitalised upon to enhance the school's identity and ethos?
- Are decision-making processes shared and transparent?
- Is the school's conceptualisation of education promoted in the community?

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS
- *Do professional learning initiatives reflect the school vision?*

COHESIVE COMMUNITY
- Is the community supportive of the school vision?
- Is the community actively involved in school planning processes?
- Does the staff assume collective responsibility for individual students and school outcomes?
- Are the contributions of individuals and groups to the school's culture and identity recognised and valued?

SCHOOL OUTCOMES
- What have students achieved?
- What new knowledge, skills and dispositions has the professional learning community created?
- What is the nature of school–community relationships?
- Are the five Contributory Elements aligned to sustain successes?

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS
- *Are collaborative professional learning processes in place?*

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS
- *Do teachers' networks/ alliances contribute to their professional growth?*

3-DIMENSIONAL PEDAGOGY
- Do teachers have a shared understanding of successful pedagogy for their school?
- Do pedagogical priorities reflect the school vision?
- Do teachers base their work in authoritative theories?
- Is student achievement measured against agreed authoritative benchmarks?
- Do teachers have clearly articulated personal pedagogical theories?

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORTS
- *Are physical/human resources available to support teachers' shared pedagogical priorities?*

INFRASTRUCTURAL DESIGN
- Do financial, physical and human inputs facilitate the school's vision and schoolwide pedagogy (SWP)?
- Is the school's use of time, space and technologies:
  - reflective of the school vision?
  - responsive to students' developmental needs?
  - conducive to quality teaching?
  - conducive to an aesthetic environment?
- Are the school's curriculum frameworks:
  - reflective of the school vision?
  - responsive to students' needs?
  - transposable into quality teaching?
- Is time allocated for reflective practice?

696

The actioning phase involves the collective application of decisions resulting from the envisioning stage within the school and broader community. The last phase is the sustaining phase, whereby the school community focuses on evaluating the progress towards schoolwide pedagogy, and reflects on ways to further develop and align successful practices.

3-Dimensional pedagogy

The three perspectives that make up a 3-dimensional pedagogy (3D.P) are teachers' personal pedagogy, authoritative pedagogy and schoolwide pedagogy. It is conceptualised that these three perspectives interrelate to result in a holistic pedagogy that is the 'core work' of teachers in the 21st century (Andrews et al., 2004, pg. 14). With 3D.P, teachers are provided with an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue regarding their successful pedagogical practices and, in doing so, are able to look at ways to integrate the three perspectives of 3D.P to reach 'new levels of pedagogical insights' (Andrews et al., 2004, pg. 14).

Through IDEAS, schoolwide pedagogical principles are developed based on student needs, the characteristics of the community and teachers' successful practices. A shared language is used and agreed upon by the entire school community to generate principles that reflect the school's vision and that balances teaching, learning and assessment practices. With schoolwide pedagogy, teaching and learning practices evident in classrooms will be based on authoritative, theoretical and systemic frameworks and are continuously reflected upon through professional learning and sharing of experiences (Crowther et al., 2001a).

Parallel leadership

Leadership best suited for the 21st century - the IDEAS Leadership Paradigm provides a mindset shift from one of positional authority to that of co-leadership (Andrews_ & Crowther, 2002; Crowther, Hann & McMaster, 2001). In this paradigm, leadership is captured by the emergence of teacher leaders, a change in principals' roles and parallel leadership.

The "awakening" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 1996) of teachers in exercising new and dynamic leadership has been observed to be crucial to school reform. In these schools, teacher leaders demonstrate "authenticity in their teaching, learning and assessment practices, facilitate communities of learning, translate ideas into systems of action and nurture a culture of success" (Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson & Hann, 2002, pg. 4). As a result, principals now take on a metastrategic role, which enables teacher leaders to work in 'parallel' with administrator leaders towards generating and sustaining "enhanced organisational capacity" (King & Newmann, 2001). For parallel leadership to be effective there must be mutual trust and respect of each party's roles – pedagogical development by teacher leaders and metastrategic development by administrator leaders, a shared sense of purpose to school values and an allowance of significant individual expression and action (Crowther et al., 2001a).

With parallel leadership as the impetus, the basic IDEAS components of organizational alignment, the *ideas* process and 3D.P, work together to allow for three

schoolwide processes – professional learning, visioning and culture building and pedagogical development – to occur. The integration of these three processes provides schools with the capacity to enhance school outcomes, resulting eventually in school revitalisation. The hidden contents of the 'black box' (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) that details how good principal leadership enables enhanced student outcomes, is beginning to be unveiled through IDEAS.

IDEAS in Singapore

In collaboration with the IDEAS Team from the Leadership Research Institute, University of Southern Queensland, and with the involvement of three Singaporean schools, we embarked on the exciting IDEAS journey in mid-2004. Each school is significantly different from the others, as a brief outline illustrates:

West Grove Primary School was established in 2001 and is a co-ed government school located in a new housing estate. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 2153 students, from Primary 1 to 6, distributed across 54 classes. The school has up-to-date facilities and a rather young teaching staff, of which a high percentage are graduates.

Marymount Convent School is a government aided, all-girls primary school with a rich history dating back to the 1940s. The school has a current enrolment of 1361 students distributed across 36 classes and a teaching staff of experienced teachers who have been at the school for less than 10 years. The school building is relatively new and is aesthetically pleasing.

Woodlands Secondary School is a co-ed government school, established in 1982. The school is located in a mature housing estate and has 1157 students enrolled in 31 classes, of which a significant percentage is non-Singaporean. Teachers at this school are relatively older with more teaching experience. The school has recently undergone the Ministry's Programme for Improving and Rebuilding Existing Schools (PRIME) and will be moving to the new school building in 2005.

These three partner schools came aboard the IDEAS project in July 2004. Their journey so far is as follows:

As required in the initiating phase of the process, a management team was assembled in each of these schools. The ISMT (Ideas School Management Team) in West Grove Primary School comprises the Vice Principal, a Head of Department (HOD) and three teachers. Marymount Convent School has 14 ISMT members, the majority of which hold leadership posts. Woodlands Secondary School has 15 members of which four are HODs, 10 are teachers and one is an administrative staff member. Members of the respective ISMT have committed themselves to driving their schools through the *IDEAS* process of school revitalisation.

A member of the ISMT shares his view on IDEAS:

IDEAS is a process and very much an enabler... it will bring about synergy and a sense of belonging. When the team is united, synergy generates a lot of benefits.

- ISMT member, West Grove Primary School, Singapore, 2004

698

At the commencement of the schools' engagement in the IDEAS Project, a 70-item survey (IDEAS Diagnostic Inventory) was disseminated to staff, parents and students as part of the discovering phase. The survey explores the degree of alignment in a school's operations by collecting information regarding the current standing of the schools' outcomes and gauging the effectiveness of each of the five RBF contributory elements (Crowther et al., 2001a).

The statement means of the staff, parent and student Diagnostic Inventories were collated and presented to the schools. The ISMT then organised a workshop with staff to explore and determine the school's successes and challenges as indicated by the means. The workshop provided a platform for staff to engage in collective conversations regarding the well-being of the school and to comprehend the important connection between pedagogical practices and the other four contributory elements of the RBF.

The output of the DI was summarized into a report card and shared with the school community.

Below is a snippet of the report card generated by Professor Frank Crowther for Marymount Convent School:

Marymount is <u>unique</u> because of the exceptional environment that the principal and teachers have created – aesthetically very attractive, reflective of spiritual values, environmentally (ecologically) sensitive, valuing of excellence in a range of subjects and enabling the teachers to create and design interesting contexts in their classrooms. Successes celebrated publicly and teachers learn from the achievements of their colleagues.

And yet, the teachers at Marymount are not fully satisfied that their school is as good as it could be....They also have concerns that some important Ministry expectations for innovative pedagogies are not fully incorporated into their individual and collective classroom practices. Hence, teachers' morale is not as high as would be expected...

- Professor Frank Crowther, Singapore, 2004

-

What's next for IDEAS in Singapore?

All three schools have recently completed the discovering phase and are moving towards the envisioning phase of the process. Thus far, the schools have gained a more well-rounded view of their current performance through the *ideas* process. They now know better what their successful practices are, what are the areas for improvement as well as the concerns of all school stake-holders.

In preparation for the envisioning phase, the teachers have begun collaborative discussions on how they may address the challenges identified by the DI. This has engaged them in sharing best teaching practices with one another as they work on developing a set of schoolwide pedagogical principles. Discussions are also directed at ways in which the school's vision can come alive for students in classrooms and at how it can be linked to their schoolwide pedagogical principles.

The three schools involved are also gradually developing a better notion of how IDEAS can be integrated with MOE initiatives, such as SEM, I&E and SEED. Should this alignment materialise, IDEAS could potentially be the key driver for coherence and integration, as it provides a much stronger research and conceptual basis for school improvement and student outcome enhancement than has previously been available. The experience to date in the pilot schools has been encouraging and progress has been faster than expected. The prospects for those schools, including students, teachers and parents, are good, and we look forward to tracking this progress as it unfolds in three substantially different environments.

References

Andrews, D., & Crowther, F. (2002). Parallel leadership: a clue to the contents of the "black box" of school reform. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 16(4)*, pp. 152-159.

Andrews, D., Conway, J., Dawson, M., Lewis, M., McMaster, J., Morgan, A., & Starr, H. (2004). *School revitalisation. The IDEAS Way.* ACEL Monograph Series. (Australian Council for Educational Leaders).

Crowther, F. (2002). Education Queensland IDEAS website, IDEAS Presentation. Online. http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/learning/ideas/html/slide.htm.

Crowther, F., Andrews, D., Dawson, M., & Lewis, M. (2001a). *IDEAS facilitation folder* (Education Queensland).

Crowther, F., Hann, L., & McMaster, J. (2001). Leadership. In P. Cuttance (Ed.), *School innovation: Pathway to the knowledge society.* Canberra: DETYA.

Crowther, F., Kaagan, S., Ferguson, M., & Hann, L. (2002). *Developing teacher leaders: How teacher leadership enhances school successes.*CA: Corwin Press.

Cuttance, P. (2001). *School innovation: Pathway to the knowledge Society.* Canberra, Australia: Online. http://www.detya.gov.au/schools/publications/index.htm.

Halinger, P., & Heck, R. (1996). Reassessing the Principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research 1980-1995. *Education Administration Quarterly, 32(1)*, pp. 5-45.

Kaplan, R., & Norton, D. (1996). *The balanced scorecard: Translating strategy into action.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Katzenmeyer, M., & Moller, G. (1996). *Awakening the sleeping giant: Helping teachers develop as leaders.* CA: Corwin Press.

King, M. B., & Newmann, F. M. (2001). Building school capacity through professional development: conceptual and empirical considerations. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 15(2)*, pp. 96-93.

Murphy, J. (1992). Effective Schools: Legacy and future directions. In D. Reynold & P. Cuttance (Eds.), *School effectiveness research, policy and practice.* London: Cassell.