

# A school wide approach to leading pedagogical enhancement: An Australian perspective

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Published online: 6 November 2015  
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**Abstract** This paper presents how some Australian schools are changing their approaches to leading the teaching and learning in their diverse and multi-characteristic contexts. Experiences of these schools shows that the development of a school wide approach to pedagogy and its implementation needs to be firmly embedded in the leadership of learning. Drawing on recent research conducted in the Sydney Catholic Education Office system in Australia (Crowther et al. in *Leading and Managing* 18(2):1–33, 2012) there is evidence of relationship between the development and implementation of a school wide approach to pedagogy and student achievement. There is also evidence to support leadership that is based on a mutualistic relationship between teacher leaders and the principal. This paper focuses on the way schools have used their visions and pedagogical frameworks to enhance whole of school quality outcomes. It highlights the power of teacher leaders taking responsibility for pedagogical development and implementation. In addition, it illustrates the power of mutualistic relationships (parallel leadership) when the principal takes responsibility for unleashing and trusting the creative expertise of teacher leaders in line with the role of strategic leadership and management.

**Keywords** Collaboration · Leading learning · Professional learning communities · Quality teaching · School leadership · School improvement · Teacher leadership

## Abbreviations

ACT	Aspire create together
AP	Authoritative pedagogy
ESL	English as a second language

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HOM	Habits of mind
IDEAS	Innovative designs for enhancing achievements in schools
<i>ideas</i>	<i>Initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning, sustaining</i>
LBOTE	Language backgrounds other than English
LRI	Leadership Research International
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy
PP	Personal pedagogy
SES	Socio-economic status
SMILE	Spirituality, multiculturalism, individuals, life, empowerment
SWP	Schoolwide pedagogy
Sydney CEO	Sydney Catholic Education Office
3-D.P	Three-dimensional pedagogy
USQ	University of Southern Queensland

## Introduction

When teachers debunk the traditional conception of teaching in the ‘privacy’ of their classroom, and begin to embrace the power of collaborative pedagogical work (that is, planning, teaching, learning and assessing), the power of a whole of school approach can be realised. And, when principals place the core of education (that is, teaching and learning) at the centre of school management and leadership, the quality of whole of school outcomes raises the potential for the future of highly relevant schooling education. Never before has this approach been more urgent, as schools of the world embrace the rapidly changing demographics of their communities and learn to meet the needs of teaching and leading the learning of their diverse and multi-characteristic enrolments.

After a decade of research and development with the school improvement project, IDEAS, the Leadership Research International (LRI, USQ, Australia) team has documented the history and concept of Schoolwide Pedagogy (SWP). The construct of SWP and its implementation is firmly embedded in the mutualistic relationship between teacher leadership and the principal. Teachers are the key to in-school pedagogical influence when there is an agreed statement of priority teaching, learning and assessment principles across the school. And, principals who articulate and practice meta-strategic leadership in support of an agreed school vision are leading with clear purpose for the whole of school enhancement and a healthy professional learning community.

This paper draws on recent research conducted in the Sydney Catholic Education Office system in Australia, and published in *Leading and Managing* (Crowther et al. 2012) and *Schoolwide Pedagogy: Vibrant new meaning for teachers and principals* (Crowther et al. 2013). The research highlighted the impact of IDEAS (Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools) on school improvement within a high performing system. There is evidence of relationship between the development and implementation of SWP and student achievement. This paper focuses on the way schools have used their visions and pedagogical frameworks to enhance whole

of school quality outcomes. It illustrates the power of teacher leaders taking responsibility for pedagogical development and implementation, and the power of parallel leadership when the meta-strategic leader takes responsibility for unleashing and trusting the creative expertise of teacher leaders in line with strategic management.

## Background literature on a school improvement project

The study from which this paper is drawn reported on schools that had actively engaged with the whole school improvement project (IDEAS) designed, implemented and researched by members of the LRI. This project, IDEAS, is designed to enable school leaders to manage developmental processes in their schools with a view to enhancing and sustaining success—in teacher professionalism, in community support and in student achievement (<http://ideas.usq.edu.au/>). In implementing IDEAS, members of the LRI IDEAS team work with the school's professional community to illuminate the work of teachers and assist teachers and school administrators to achieve clarified direction, shared pedagogy and aligned infrastructures.

IDEAS was informed initially from research of others (e.g. Cooperrider and Whitney 1996; Crevola and Hill 1998; Drucker 1946; Hord 1997; Mitchell and Sackney 2001; Newmann and Wehlage 1995; Senge et al. 1994; Zuber-Skerritt 1990) and built on by members of the LRI. This research included studies in Australian schools in Southern Queensland (Crowther et al. 2001–2004); in designated low SES 'failing' schools in Victoria (Andrews and USQ-LRI Research Team 2009); in the Sydney Catholic Education Office system (Andrews et al. 2012); and in Singapore (Chew and Andrews 2010). Also informing the project were studies from doctoral students attached to the LRI (Abawi 2012; Conway 2008; Dawson 2010; Jeyaraj 2011; Lewis 2003; Morgan 2008). This research has developed a body of knowledge about leadership for sustainable school improvement, as recognised by Hargreaves (in Crowther and Associates 2011) in his comment, "this is the third book arising from the IDEAS Project and the body of knowledge that has accumulated from its experience and achievements" (p. xv). The background literature presented in this section of the paper captures this body of knowledge and situates it within the wider literature of school improvement, leadership and whole school change. This background is presented under the headings: underpinning assumptions, core components and capacity building.

### Underpinning assumptions

There are five assumptions (principles of practice) that underpin the IDEAS project. These assumptions have been adopted from school improvement literature as well as what we know from our research about what needs to be in place in the school community for successful school improvement. Table 1 outlines these principles.

**Table 1** IDEAS underpinning assumptions for successful school improvement

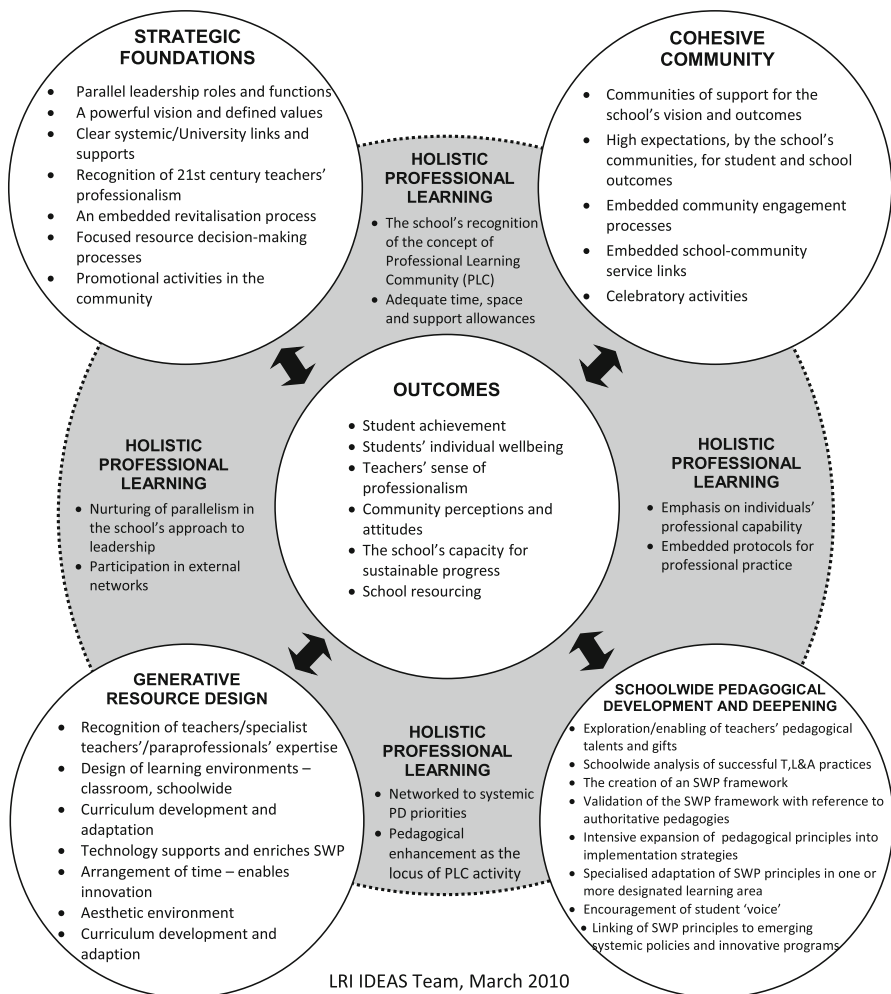
<p>1. Influence/impact Newmann and Wehlage (1995) Crevola and Hill (1998) King and Newmann (1999, 2000) Smylie and Hart (1999) Cuttance (2001) Lieberman and Miller (2004) Robinson et al. (2008) Abawi (2012)</p>	<p>Teachers are the key—IDEAS is centred around the creation of a shared approach to teaching and learning, that is, Schoolwide Pedagogy (SWP) in which teachers are the central players, and teacher leadership is central to the creation and implementation of SWP</p>
<p>2. PL and PLC Louis et al. (1996) Hord (1997, 2009) Smylie and Hart (1999) Mitchell and Sackney (2000, 2001) Lewis (2003) Conway (2008)</p>	<p>Professional learning is the key to professional revitalisation—IDEAS enables successful classroom practices (SWP) and the school’s vision to be brought into alignment through individual and collective professional learning</p>
<p>3. Motivation/ engagement Newmann and Wehlage (1995) Bryk and Schneider (2003) Hord (1997)</p>	<p>Success breeds success—a focus on successes enables the professional community of the school to accept that they are responsible for their school’s achievements and they have a non-threatening starting point in pursuing heightened achievements</p>
<p>4. Culture Newmann and Wehlage (1995) Cooperrider and Whitney (1996) Mitchell and Sackney (2001) Bryk and Schneider (2002) Dawson (2010)</p>	<p>No blame—IDEAS requires the identification of processes that will redress perceived deficits. As processes rather than people are the focus of attention, personalised criticism and blame are avoided</p>
<p>5. Whole school approach Drucker (1946) Senge et al. (1994) Newmann and Wehlage (1995) Jeyaraj (2011)</p>	<p>Alignment of school processes is a collective school responsibility—a fundamental goal for an IDEAS school is to create a meaningful alignment between the school’s strategic vision and values, community expectations of the school, the use of school resources, pedagogical practices and professional development</p>

### Core components

Each of these components underpins a theoretical understanding of the IDEAS project. These include: a process for improvement; an organisational framework; an understanding of teachers’ work; and a leadership construct. Each of these is now presented along with supporting literature.

#### *A process for improvement: The ideas process*

The *ideas* process is a five-phase strategy, spread over a 2–3 year period that enables school leaders to manage processes of implementing their own school



**Fig. 1** The research-based framework for enhancing school outcomes

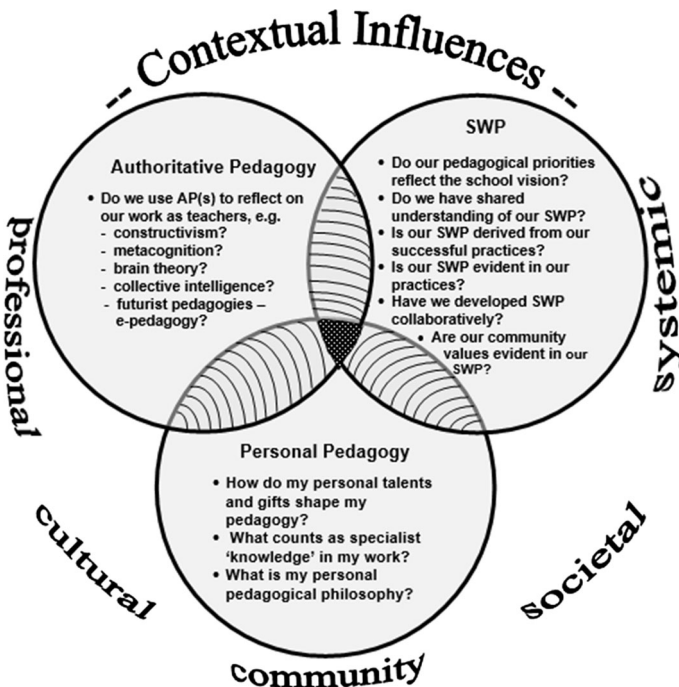
priorities. This process draws on highly authoritative sources such as metastrategy (Limerick et al. 1998); appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney 1996); action learning (Argyris and Schon 1996; Kolb 1984; Zuber-Skerritt 1990); and organisational capacity building (Crowther and Associates 2011; D. Hargreaves 2001; Newmann et al. 2000; Mitchell and Sackney 2001). Each of the five phases—initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning and sustaining (*ideas*)—centres on the professional work of teachers, both pedagogically and in relation to leadership.

*Organisational framework: The research-based framework for enhancing school outcomes (RBF)*

In the IDEAS project, the organisational concept of internal school ‘alignment’ (or ‘harmony’) is a major consideration and is defined as follows:

Alignment in educational organisations occurs when distinct and interdependent organisational elements are mutually reinforcing, thereby providing increased opportunities for capacity-building. (Crowther and Associates 2011, p. 53)

A diagrammatic representation of the organisational framework (RBF) is contained in Fig. 1. The five fundamental variables contributing to alignment are:



**Fig. 2** 3-D.P—three-dimensional pedagogy. *Source:* Andrews and Crowther (2003) reproduced in Crowther et al. (2013)

1. *Strategic foundations*: leadership and strategic management capability
2. *Cohesive community*: internal and external stakeholder support
3. *Generative resource design*: includes curricula, spatial arrangements, technologies, marketing, quality assurance strategies
4. *Schoolwide pedagogy*: pedagogical practices
5. *Holistic professional learning*: professional learning mechanisms

When these five sets of variables are developed, and in alignment with each other, a school's potential to enhance its outcomes is maximised. The focus or purpose centring organisational and cognitive alignment is the integral relationship between the Vision and Values (Strategic Foundations) brought alive through the creation and implementation of Schoolwide Pedagogy (SWP) (Crowther et al. 2009; Jeyaraj 2011; Newmann and Wehlage 1995). The Vision-SWP link provides focus for collaborative action, resource allocation and holistic professional learning (Andrews and Lewis 2002, 2004, 2007; Louis et al. 1996). Participating IDEAS project schools use the RBF at a number of junctures during their IDEAS project journeys, commencing with a systematic approach to organisational diagnosis using the IDEAS Diagnostic Inventory (DISA) at the *Discovery* phase of the process.

#### *An image of teaching: Three-dimensional pedagogy (3-D.P)*

The work of the twenty first century professional teacher was conceptualised by Andrews and Crowther (2003) as three-dimensional (refer Fig. 2), and acknowledges the concept of collaborative individualism (Limerick et al. 1998). The dimensions encompass the integration of personal pedagogy (PP), schoolwide pedagogy (SWP) and authoritative pedagogy (AP). Each teacher is regarded as potentially possessing personal gifts, strengths, capabilities, aspirations and values. Accordingly, 3-D.P teachers develop their personal self at the same time as they contribute to their school's SWP and explore the potential of various authoritative pedagogies in their work (Andrews and Crowther 2003).

Schoolwide Pedagogy (SWP) is defined as:

... a school's expression of its priority teaching, learning and assessment. An SWP represents teachers' agreement regarding the pre-eminent teaching, learning and assessment processes for their school; reflects the school vision and extends into the life of classrooms; and provides a vehicle to enable teachers to develop heightened connectivity in the learning experiences of students across year levels and subjects. (Crowther et al. 2013, p. 4)

And has six distinguishing criteria, that is, an SWP:

1. is clear and concise, comprising a limited number of practical pedagogical principles
2. facilitates connectivity, reinforcement and consolidation in students' core learning experiences across year levels and subjects
3. honours the distinctive features and needs of the school's student community

4. provides a powerful framework in which teachers can identify, enrich and share their professional gifts and talents
5. is informed by authoritative educational theorists, philosophies and research
6. is authentic and inseparable from teacher leadership—in development, implementation and sustainability. (pp. 4–5)

### *Leadership construct*

Leadership in the IDEAS project is conceptualised as parallel leadership and reflects the shift “from a single person, role orientated view to a view of leadership as an organisational property shared amongst administrators, teachers and perhaps others” (Smylie and Hart 1999, p. 428). Many authors support this broader conceptualisation of leadership, for example, Fullan 2005; Murphy 2005; Spillane 2006; Gronn 2008; Leithwood et al. 2008. Hargreaves and Shirley (2007) claim that this form of leadership is a Fourth Way [SL] construct because it “... builds capacity and develops leadership succession in a dynamic and integrated strategy of change” (p. 97).

In the IDEAS project, the term, parallel leadership is used to capture the mutualistic relationship that is developed between the principal and teacher leaders in engagement with whole school improvement. Parallel leadership is *a process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collective action for purposes of schoolwide development and revitalisation to enhance the school’s ‘capacity’* (Crowther et al. 2002, 2009). Teacher leaders’ functions in parallel leadership emphasise pedagogical enhancement, particularly schoolwide pedagogical enhancement (Crowther et al. 2002, 2009).

An early conceptual framework of Teacher Leadership was proposed by Lieberman et al. (1988), and Lieberman with others (Lieberman and Friedrich 2010; Lieberman and Miller 2004) has continued to relate evidence of the importance of teacher leadership in school improvement. Other authors, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001); Harris (2004, 2008); Murphy et al. (2009), have also continued to develop the concept and provide evidence of its importance in school improvement. However, Crowther et al. (2002, 2009) and Andrews and Crowther (2002) have explored teacher leadership within a broader construct of leadership, known as Parallel Leadership (Andrews and Crowther 2002; Crowther et al. 2002). This relationship acknowledges the professionalism of teachers through mutualism,

**Table 2** The five metastrategic functions of the principal in school improvement

Function one	Envisioning inspiring futures
Function two	Aligning key institutional elements
Function three	Enabling teacher leadership
Function four	Building synergistic alliances
Function five	Culture-building and identity generation

Source: Crowther et al. (2009, p. 71)



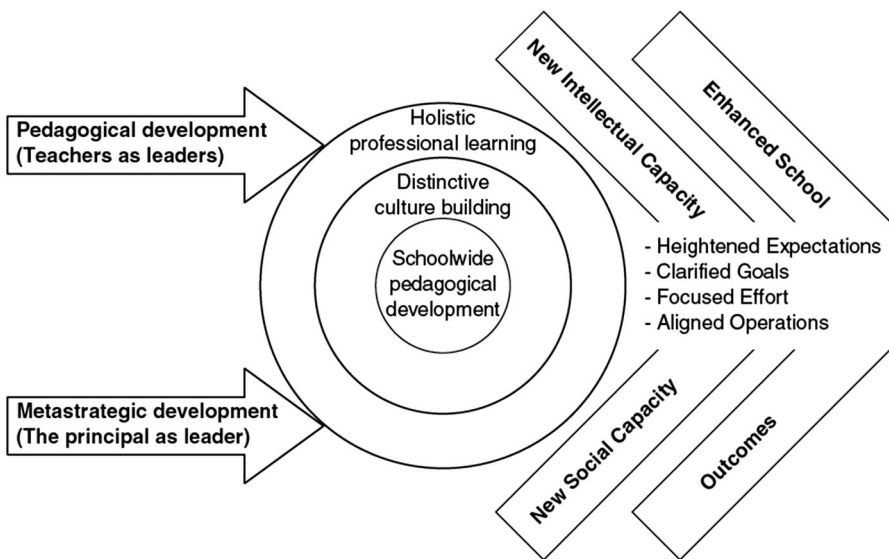
teacher–principal relatedness and its established links to enhanced school outcomes. Teacher Leadership functions emphasise pedagogical enhancement, particularly school wide pedagogical development and expert practitionership (Crowther et al. 2002, 2009).

Principals’ leadership functions in the construct of parallel leadership are conceptualised as ‘metastrategic’ (Crowther et al. 2002, 2009) and are outlined in Table 2. Meta-strategy is drawn from the work of Limerick et al. (1998) that links vision, identity, configuration (strategy, structure and identity) and systems of action. It is the enabling processes of the principal that builds significant leadership capacity within the school (Crowther and Associates 2011; Dawson 2010). Harris (in Bush et al. 2010) has a similar view of school leadership:

Meeting the needs of the twenty-first century schooling will require greater leadership capability and capacity within the system than ever before. It will demand that principals concentrate their efforts on developing the leadership capabilities and capacities of others. (p. 62)

*Capacity building*

Schools that have engaged in IDEAS have informed Crowther and Associates’ (2011) definition of capacity building, that is, an “intentional process of mobilizing a school’s resources in order to enhance priority outcomes—and sustain those improved outcomes” (p. 20). Fullan (2005) acknowledges that capacity building is a central component of the strategy for large scale reform. Further, Hopkins and Jackson (2003) claim that “without a clear focus on ‘capacity’, a school will be



**Fig. 3** Linking parallel leadership and successful capacity-building. *Source:* Crowther et al. (2009, p. 60)

unable to sustain continuous improvement efforts or to manage change effectively” (p. 87).

The *ideas* process enables the emergence, maturation and influence of three developmental processes—professional learning, SWP and culture-building—as indicated in Fig. 3. It is through the power of these processes that heightened school outcomes are made possible.

## The research approach and design

The research study upon which the findings of this paper are based used mixed methods research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Teddlie and Tashakkori 2009) that integrates the collection and analysis of both quantitative numeric data and qualitative (in this instance) case study data. The purpose was to initially establish a quantifiable measure of success, isolate those schools (cases) that had achieved and sustained this success and then use this identification to build on an understanding of in-school influences that reportedly contributed to the successful outcomes (qualitative data). This sequential process we have called ‘drilling down’ which has enabled a deepened understanding of authentic data.

The research study in 2010 investigated the implementation of IDEAS in two cohorts of schools in the Sydney CEO, 2006–2007. The first cohort, comprising 10 primary (elementary) schools, began IDEAS in 2006. The second cohort included 15 primary schools and five secondary colleges, and began the process a year later in 2007. The participating schools were mainly located in the highly multi-cultural,

### Phase One: Systemic Phase – CEO Achievement Levels, 1997-2007

The researchers worked with CEO research staff to assemble systemic data from standardised tests.

**Comment:** Statistical tables were prepared for CEO achievement data.

### Phase Two: IDEAS Project Achievement Levels 2006-2007

Demographic descriptions of IDEAS schools (N = 30 including NAPLAN data) were compiled by the researchers and CEO research staff.

**Comment:** Statistical tables were prepared for the IDEAS project data.

### Phase Three: Case Study Schools

A cross section of schools was selected for possible case study research (n=9).

A small sample (n=4) was drawn from 2006-2007 cohorts based on:

1. completed IDEAS comprehensively
2. a statistically significant improvement in Reading and/or Numeracy over a three year period.

**Comment:** Detailed case study prepared.

**Fig. 4** Research phases: a drilling down process

low SES, and high level of ESL assisted learning. The Sydney CEO system has experienced, especially in the inner west and surrounding west and southern regions, a growing number of students coming from recently arrived, often refugee families. These changing demographics have raised many challenges for teachers in these schools to embrace the system's vision of increasing and sustaining the level of academic achievement for all students within their system (<http://www.ceosyd.catholic.edu.au/Pages/Home.aspx>).

When the LRI research team engaged with some preliminary case studies of such schools that had engaged with the IDEAS project in these regions, it was found that many of these schools were achieving well above most 'like schools' and, for some, well above the schools within the CEO high performing system. The research sought to explore the internal and external factors that contributed to the schools' reported successes. The research process as captured in Fig. 4 included the following phases:

*Phase one and two* of the research included examination of standardised test results from CEO schools compared with NSW and National test results (NAPLAN) assembling systemic data from standardised test results of the 2006–2007 IDEAS cohort ( $n = 30$ ). These results were compared with system, state and national norms. Reports on student learning outcomes in literacy (reading) and numeracy (mainly NAPLAN, 2008–2010) were compiled on a school-by-school basis according to two criteria: (1) trends over time; and (2) growth over time.

*Phase three*—a sample of nine case study schools from the 2006 to 2007 IDEAS cohort was selected through analysis of the phase one and two research databases. The sample selection was made on the basis of an interrogation of this database and subject to schools' availability and willingness, or otherwise, to be involved in the research. The data for each school included: (1) the trend and growth data of literacy and numeracy from the NAPLAN testing; (2) the demographics; (3) documentary evidence of engagement in the IDEAS project; (4) classroom observations of teachers implementing the SWP; and (5) interviews of teacher leaders, the principal and the system support personnel. From these case studies, a smaller sample selection (four) was made for in-depth case study analysis on the basis of a school achieving statistically significant improvement in Reading and/or Numeracy over a 3-year period.

## Case study

The case study used in this paper is one of the four in-depth case studies from those reported in the larger study. This case study has been selected to illustrate key elements of how teacher leaders, working in a mutualistic relationship with their principal, have used their vision and pedagogical framework to enhance their whole of school quality outcomes. This relationship enables the teacher leaders to use their creative expertise in line with strategic management.

## St Kilda's Primary (Elementary) School case study

A whole school improvement process (the IDEAS project) and subsequent establishment of systems of action in the school have enabled ongoing organisational, professional collaborative and individual learning. This action has resulted in sustained success in student learning outcomes. The outcomes at St Kilda's Primary (Elementary) School (pseudonym) are the result of the mutualistic relationship in goal setting and capacity building between the teacher leaders and their principal in leading the community.

### Background context

The Principal of St Kilda's (see Fig. 5) recognised and knew that something had to be done to meet the needs of the changing demographics—"the school needed to respond to the fact that a large number of children arrived in Kindy with very little English and very little experience of their own language" (Principal). She explained that there was an urgent need for "teachers and students to get onto the same page". This case study focuses on a successful change that took 3 years for the capacity of a professional staff to be built in teacher leadership and pedagogical improvement. With the leadership of the principal, supported by the system and their school vision, student achievement resulted in an upward trend.

#### Profile:

**Pseudonym:** St Kilda's Primary (elementary) School

**Location:** a Catholic systemic school within the Archdiocese of Sydney located in the Inner West Region surrounded by suburbs of young families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Profile:** Grades 1-6; 420 students of whom 98% come from Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LBOTE); attendance is high at 95%; population slightly above average Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).

**Staff:** 27 teaching staff with 21.8 full-time equivalent teaching staff managing classes of approximately 30 students; 12 non-teaching staff; inclusive of 5 teaching aides representative of the 5 dominant languages amongst the student enrolment.

**Founding Order:** With a history of foundation on the current site from the early 1900s, the Sisters of St Joseph led the school until the mid-1980s when the first lay principal was appointed.

*Aspire  
Create  
Together*

**Fig. 5** Profile of St Kilda's Primary (Elementary) School

As a Catholic community with strong links to the Josephite tradition, St Kilda's focuses on interaction with each other, respect for each person's uniqueness and the teachings of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, strongly enacted through the motive of Mary MacKillop who conducted her work with the motto 'never see a need without doing something about it'. In fact, this school has continually responded to the needs of its community with its many demographic changes spanning over 100 years of history, from an initial enrolment of principally Irish background to one that currently acknowledges approximately 30 different cultural backgrounds, and with that a range of language backgrounds other than English.

St Kilda's is a complex, unique community striving to meet the needs of its community in many ways, but most celebrated is the way in which each family is warmly welcomed into the school community. The school brochure is printed in the five dominant languages of the school community and employment of a teacher aide for each one of those languages are deliberate moves to ensure that communication with the majority of families is uppermost. Numerous anecdotes of this enactment can be heard amongst the staff ranging from provision from a teacher's lunch box for a child whose family could not afford food that day, to the school's training and employment of a single mother of refugee status to ensure her dreams for her child's education might be met.

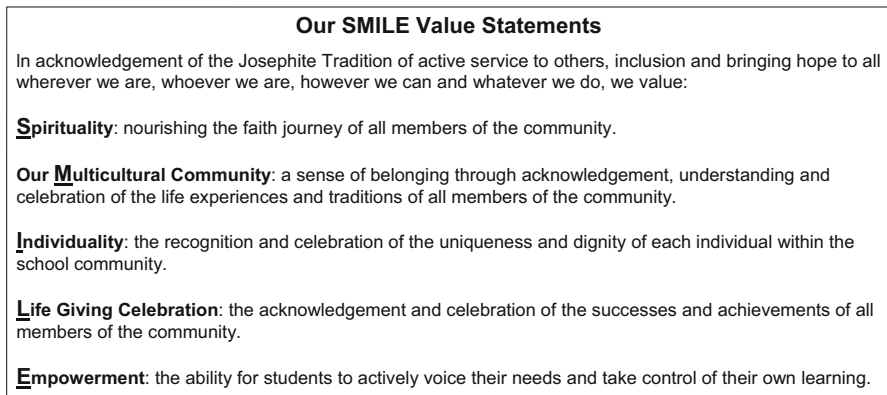
### Act on a need

In acknowledgement of the Josephite tradition of 'acting on a need', St Kilda's promotes a culture of inclusion and bringing hope to all through their valuing of spirituality, the multiculturalism of community, individuals, life celebrations, and empowerment—SMILE. Furthermore, St Kilda's vision—aspire create together (ACT), is brought to life through the teaching and learning in their ACTIVE pedagogical framework. Large posters (see Figs. 6, 7, 8) of the Vision, Values and Schoolwide Pedagogy adorn the walls of learning spaces as teachers and students engage in shared pedagogical understandings and practice.

The principal highlighted that "we are all in this together", and promoted the community as standing united behind the school Vision: *A community that ACT*. She spoke of a strong learning community meeting the individual needs of students academically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. At every opportunity there



**Fig. 6** St Kilda's vision



**Fig. 7** St Kilda's SMILE value statements

are aims to personalise learning so that each member of the community is supported to realise and utilise their strengths and passions and to work on areas that need improvement. The principal used the charisma of the foundress to respond to current needs, and explained the use of an explicit contextually-developed language of teaching and learning used by the teachers and students.

### **Their meaning of success**

We could define success at St Kilda's Primary School as the involvement of teachers, students and parents working together in line with contemporary pedagogy to create new knowledge and ideas. (Principal and IDEAS Facilitator)

The researchers observed the use, and heard the language of the school's Vision, Values and SWP in support of a 'way of working'. The principal and the IDEAS facilitator provided convincing evidence of a changed pedagogical culture. They explained how professional learning processes and activities for school improvement had developed a culture of trust and respect amongst the teachers. Teachers felt confident to talk openly about their work and felt free to take risks without any condemnation or blame.

I think my theory is 'what's the worst thing that could possibly happen?'  
(Principal)

There was a willingness to move to the use of more open and engaging learning environments grounded in contemporary pedagogy. Teachers then realised the need to change their teaching programs to allow students to have a voice in their learning, thus resulting in learning centres, personalised learning programs, and inquiry-based learning. Professional learning teams were established, and parents were invited to give their opinions at forums. One significant outcome was the research finding that showed evidence for success based on growth in reading and numeracy outcomes

## ACTIVE PEDAGOGY



### *Active Commitment:*

*“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”  
– 2 Timothy 4:7*

#### **As a learning community, we:**

- are dedicated to teaching and learning
- are committed to keeping up-to-date with current research and initiatives in education
- have a deep knowledge of the subject matter taught in each key learning area
- promote goal setting.



### *Creativity:*

*“Let your light shine before men” – Matthew 5:14*

#### **As a learning community, we:**

- promote active involvement in lifelong learning
- promote problem solving and lateral thinking
- encourage risk-taking and develop resilience.



### *Teamwork:*

*“I appeal to you...that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you are united in the same mind and the same judgement.” – 1 Corinthians 1:10*

#### **As a learning community, we:**

- work collaboratively to create authentic learning spaces and experiences
- skill students to construct new knowledge, independently and collaboratively
- develop students’ ability to make informed choices about their learning
- encourage students to have a voice in their learning
- ensure the language of learning is consistent and predictable across the school.



### *Individual:*

*“We are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us” – Romans 12:5-7*

#### **As a learning community, we:**

- assess, acknowledge and support differences in learning styles, and needs
- recognise and build on students’ prior knowledge, skills and attitudes towards learning
- develop students as a whole including the spiritual, physical, social, emotional, and academic needs
- personalise the learning to suit the needs of our learners.

**Fig. 8** St Kilda’s SWP

*Vision:*

*“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realise this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?” – 2 Corinthians 13:5*

**As a learning community, we:**

- **ensure our vision and values are reflected in teaching and learning experiences**
- **encourage reflective practices in teaching and learning**
- **develop the student’s ability to be critical and discerning thinkers who are able to make positive contributions to our world**
- **assist students to make meaningful connections between concepts explored in the classroom and the real world.**

*Empathy:*

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” – 1 Peter 4:10*

**As a learning community, we:**

- value and share the life experiences of the community
- nurture students’ spiritual growth
- allow for open communication between teachers, parents and students
- build students’ self-confidence and develop positive relationships with the students
- promote awareness of environmental issues and encourage students to actively care for and respect our school environment.

**Fig. 8** continued

and trend data as measured by the NAPLAN (Australian National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy) testing program (see Table 3).

It was obvious to the researchers that a rich body of contextual knowledge had contributed to their success, and more significantly was the way in which this success was being sustained through a commitment to leadership, in particular parallel leadership.

**Table 3** St Kilda’s Primary (Elementary) School NAPLAN growth, compared with state growth, 2008–2010

	School growth (%)	State growth (%)	Difference (%)
St Kilda’s			
Yr5 Reading	98.5	83.8	14.7
Yr5 Numeracy	122.5	89.1	33.4

Source: Andrews et al. (2012, p. 65)



## Leadership commitment to whole school improvement

St Kilda's adopted the IDEAS project in 2006, in support of their identified need for school improvement, and their commitment "about a better world by articulating a positive future for all students" (Crowther et al. 2009, p. 3). Initially the principal had recognised their need to learn how to work with the rapidly changing demographic enrolment with particularly high levels of Language Backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), coupled with the fact that their school was not favoured by the majority of teachers as a place of long-term employment. The school experienced a high turnover of newly graduated teachers and was struggling to sustain capacity for ensuring consistency of quality teaching and learning in an ever changing community.

From 2006 to 2010 at the time of data collection for the research project, the staff of St Kilda's engaging in the *ideas* processes was steadily acknowledging and understanding their cultural identity and building a way of working through the development of their Vision and SWP by "a shared, schoolwide approach to core pedagogical processes" (Crowther et al. 2009, p. 3). At this point it was acknowledged that IDEAS at St Kilda's had become a 'way of working', that is, to ACT, which infiltrated all aspects of school life.

Initially, the school management team of the IDEAS project consisted of three classroom teachers from across the grade levels and the principal, who it is important to note, was not the facilitator. Rather, an early career teacher in her second year from graduation bravely led with the skilled balance of keeping the 'big picture' in view together with the management of engaging the staff in a range of professional learning activities which enabled a "translat[ion of] ideas into sustainable systems of action" (Crowther et al. 2009, p. 3). Professional learning activities included exploring and sharing personal pedagogies and successful teaching practice, facilitated via effective professional conversation (Conway 2014). The team members grew in capacity as strong teacher leaders emerged demonstrating the characteristics of teacher leadership.

They were confidently and competently leading the whole community in ways that had never before been experienced and analysed: professional learning skills

**Table 4** Teachers as leaders in action

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Teacher leaders...

*Convey convictions about a better world by articulating a positive future for all students*

*Facilitate communities of learning by encouraging a shared, schoolwide approach to core pedagogical processes*

*Strive for pedagogical excellence by showing genuine interest in students' needs and well-being*

*Confront barriers in the school's culture and structures by standing up for children, especially disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups*

*Translate ideas into sustainable systems of action by internal and external networking*

*Nurture a culture of success by acting on opportunities to emphasize accomplishments and high expectations*

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Adapted from Crowther et al. (2009, p. 3)

and procedures engaged the professional staff as learners. Simultaneously, these teacher leaders began to articulate their learning pathways as they confronted and negotiated issues ('barriers') in the school's culture, and presented options for working with the particular issues of culture differences and limited English language competence amongst the student population. They also grew in confidence by creatively presenting ways of working with the principal to strategically form new ways of working within the school. For example, the regular staff meetings were transformed into more meaningful professional learning opportunities to encourage all staff to learn and practise innovative ways of working with the issues of early learning literacy and numeracy; the curriculum coordinator programmed time in each class to model and assist with literacy learning blocks. Table 4 captures teachers as leaders in action.

Of significant note is that a whole of school approach to the explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy is in place. A feature of the school is the strong language program which supports successful English learning, especially for those with a language background other than English (LBOTE). The professional learning of teachers is supported with a focus on the need for explicit teaching strategies and assessment that challenge the students to be life-long learners. The SWP framework and core values are linked very closely to contemporary approaches which include 'Habits of Mind' (HOM) and 'Understanding by Design'. The language and intention of these approaches is well integrated into the St Kilda's ACTIVE pedagogical framework and both approaches are well supported by the Sydney Catholic Education Office system. A focus of these approaches is to enhance student learning and develop critical thinking skills through the use of a meta-language, for example the 'Stop and think' strategy of HOM. In this way students are extended in their learning, empowering them to achieve their personal goals.

### **Interpretation of success**

Based on the richness of this case study, characteristic of many of the schools that had successfully engaged with the IDEAS project of the 2006–2007 cohort, we have interpreted this success through: leadership of the process; the power of professional learning; the importance of the induction of newly appointed teachers together with the ongoing staff; sustainability of the process; and the school's relationship to the system. Whilst we have written distinctively about each of these characteristics, it should be acknowledged that there is an interrelationship amongst them: for example the sustainability of the process and thus the overall success is dependent on the induction of all teachers, which is integrally related to the robustness of the professional learning experiences, and the leadership of the process (Andrews et al. 2012; Crowther et al. 2012).

#### *Leadership of the process*

Initially it was the principal who identified a need that was increasing as the demographic enrolment of the school changed. The adoption of IDEAS was the result of a long-term, multifaceted, complex process which began with the

principal's strong leadership and commitment to improving students' education and learning, and the decision to take action to make changes. She acknowledged that the nature of the learning situation for the particular context of children and their families and community of St Kilda's needed to respond to its vast majority of ESL students who entered school with little or no English.

However, it was the principal's skilful engagement through enabling opportunities for teachers of leadership potential to see themselves in the role of leader-as-learner. Her approach might well have been interpreted as one of high risk with relatively inexperienced early career teachers and a high turnover of teacher appointments, but as she so confidently expressed, "what's the worst that can happen?... we had to do better".

### *Professional learning*

As distinct from an understanding that teachers need to attend certain sessions/workshops/presentations/programs, or schools need to have the external expert input for professional development, this study has revealed a powerful focus on the authentic professional learning of the individual and the collective as pertaining to the needs in situ. This is a situation we term 'relational practice' which is "most effectively manifested through the development of a strong sense of ownership, shared amongst the participants of the process as it is relative to their context" and what emerges is "heightened recognition of a consciousness of the creation of significant new meaning" (Conway 2008, p. 225). Similarly, Robertson (2013) calls for a new way of thinking about professional learning for leadership-learning engaging the 'leader-as-learner' in metacognitive and reflective processes.

This approach has resulted in the development of a new culture of professional learning. It is a teacher-led professional learning community which has established a nucleus of committed people (including the principal) and the success of teacher parallel leadership to drive change and sustain the resultant new routines and ways of working well recognised in the school. It is a culture of professional learning that embraces ownership and commitment specific to the individual and collective needs of the professional community.

### *Induction of teachers*

With a high incidence of loss of staff on long-term maternity leave and those leaving for promotional purposes it has also been necessary to design an induction program for incoming new staff. Thus, newly appointed staff members are taken through the journey of IDEAS at St Kilda's, inclusive of the development of the Vision, Values and SWP narrative, to provide them with an understanding of the context of their work. They then engage in various workshop activities conducted for all staff members as part of the ongoing school improvement process. This includes the opportunity to view snapshots of learning that exemplify St Kilda's '*ACTIVE pedagogy*'. Of poignancy during the research study was the emphatic voice of two newly appointed teachers who stated that they had not been involved in the development of the Vision and SWP, but stressed that "this is too good a

pedagogy to let die...we will uphold and respect the good work of others before us". They explained that it is a shared way of working that has a distinctive language of agreed pedagogical principles aligned to the identified needs of the student population.

Through the development of the Schoolwide Approach to Pedagogy (ACTIVE Pedagogy) all staff are supported to enact changes in practice to a schoolwide pedagogy. St Kilda's staff are constantly recognising the importance of developing language and thinking skills that form the basis of support for students' acquisition and growth in reading/literacy and numeracy.

### *Sustainability*

Continuing the shared understanding and enactment of ACTIVE pedagogy at St Kilda's is the drive for developing ongoing systems of action. This has included the establishment of collaborative professional learning teams (as opposed to staff meetings) in which practices of professional conversations through skilful discussions provide support for the teachers' professional learning, in conjunction with the principal's management of the budget to achieve appropriate deployment of resources, strategies and structures to facilitate the complexity of change.

Leadership, in particular parallel leadership, has ensured that ongoing professional learning with a focus on pedagogy is a significant factor in sustaining success. Specific to this approach in strengthening individual and collective professional learning is the use of the SWP as a lens for dialogue about existing, new, and systems-imposed practices.

It is the 'deepening pedagogy' dynamic of capacity building for school improvement (Crowther and Associates 2011) that is of paramount importance for sustainability. Specifically, at St Kilda's this involves the development of a shared pedagogical meta-language. All teaching is underpinned by the common use of this pedagogical language and understanding of what their ACTIVE pedagogy comprises. It is the strengthening and deepening of their SWP that engages teachers in a common explicit practice contributing to and accessing timely internal and external assessment data. This pedagogical approach reflects a deeper understanding of the learners and teachers being better equipped to collaboratively develop their practice to meet the students' needs and maximise their learning outcomes in reading and numeracy.

### *School's relationship to the system*

St Kilda's is just one of many schools in a highly effective educational system that exemplifies a culture of relational trust. The Sydney CEO has a clear sense of moral purpose: it is the "[d]evelopment of an education system that can impact positively on student achievement has been a long-term priority for Sydney CEO senior leaders" (Andrews et al. 2012, p. 31) that demonstrates accountability to regulatory bodies, the school community and the CEO. The relationship between the school and the CEO is developed in consultation with a regional consultant who monitors that the school has appropriate processes in place. Furthermore, the school's

achievement of intended key improvements for student learning is stated in its Annual Development Plan which is informed by the indicators of effectiveness for Sydney Catholic Schools specified in the CEO documentation. And again, through consultation with the school's regional consultant the school engages in an annual evidence-based evaluation of its effectiveness against these external standards. As shared by the principal and the regional consultant for St Kilda's, it is not difficult for this expectation to be one and the same with what has been developed through their engagement with the school improvement processes of IDEAS.

Specifically for St Kilda's, staff attendance at systemic-run leadership development programs, strategic adoption of system-supported projects, and involvement in CEO-initiated projects in collaboration with external educational bodies has informed teaching and learning and added value to the implementation of their SWP. As quoted in one particular report: "staff are committed to continuous improvement of teaching and learning"; "have trialled a variety of strategies based on current theory and practice to enhance student learning"; "students are engaged in decision making and risk taking". These outcomes are significant for a school that has identified its needs and facilitated teacher leadership for the development of its shared SWP and commitment to ongoing professional learning.

Overall, the success of sustainable school improvement at St Kilda's has highlighted the importance of focused leadership, shared leadership and the development of a vibrant professional learning community. The teacher-led collaborative process developed an SWP illustrating how each of the six agreed pedagogical principles comprising their ACTIVE framework, relates to authoritative pedagogies and systemic policies. Furthermore, teachers and the principal engaged in whole school professional learning to enhance their ability to implement the SWP with a specific focus on their need to support students of high need in the development of English language and literacy.

## Case study summary

The case study of St Kilda's school indeed highlights the urgent need for teachers to debunk the traditional conception of teaching in the 'privacy' of their classroom, and for principals to place the core business of education, that is student achievement, at the centre of school leadership and management. This professional community, led by their clear-sighted and committed principal, has responded to the specific learning needs of their diverse demographic enrolment and in so doing, been challenged to rethink and redevelop their pedagogy. Teacher leaders have risen to the challenge of creating new ways of thinking and acting in response to this challenge.

The professional community has embraced ownership of an agreed school wide developed approach to effective teaching and learning for an explicitly defined purpose. There is evidence of a clearly identified moral purpose, that is, they have recognised the specific needs of their student body and responded with a values-based vision and pedagogy specific to their context. Furthermore, they have made the connections between their SWP and the system requirements with the support of

system personnel in a culture of relational trust. The meta-strategic leader has entrusted the creative expertise of teacher leaders with the responsibility for pedagogical development and implementation in response to specific student needs. This is indeed a case of heightened success for focused learning: their need to ACT has been enhanced through their SWP.

## Conclusion

We began this paper with a call for heightened pedagogical leadership in schools facing rapidly changing demographics and learning to meet the needs of teaching and leading the learning of their diverse and multi-characteristic enrolments. We concluded with a focus on the way a particular school has responded to this need through their development of a mutualistic relationship between teacher leaders and their principal; the power of teacher leaders taking responsibility for pedagogical development and implementation; and the power of parallel leadership when the meta-strategic leader takes responsibility for unleashing and trusting the creative expertise of teacher leaders in line with strategic management.

The ‘voice of the teacher’, ‘place of teacher leadership’, and ‘benefits of shared leadership’ are expressions that have long been heard in response to the quest for raising the quality of teaching and learning. Well over a decade ago Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) presented the provocation about the ‘awakening of the sleeping giants’ in relation to helping teachers develop as leaders. Others (Harris 2008; Lambert 2003; Mulford 2007; Timperley 2005) have continued the cause especially in relation to the issues of leadership and school improvement. However, we posit that more recent research (Bond 2015; Curtis 2013; Lieberman and Friedrich 2010) has brought this issue to the fore with enlightenment about how teacher leadership is reality. The Curtis (2013) report, *Finding a new way: Leveraging teacher leadership to meet unprecedented demands*, reminds us of the variation across school systems, the transformative nature of the work, and the importance of working “intentionally and strategically, [whilst being] guided by an inspiring vision” (p. iv). In a special edition of *The Educational Forum*, Ann Lieberman (2015) as guest editor introduces *Creating the Conditions for Learning: Teachers as Leaders* by positing that “teacher leadership...is not just role specific,...it can function in contexts as varied as preservice, curriculum review initiatives, professional development, and school-university partnerships” (p. 3). An earlier perspective (Lieberman and Friedrich 2010) drew attention to the importance of vignettes and case studies adding value to the work of academic research with “a picture of the social, intellectual, and emotional story of how human beings nuance and challenge” the conceptual frames of the “complex and contextualised dailiness of the work” (p. 100). And to cap the scene of potential implications and lessons to be learned, we are impressed by the edited work of Nathan Bond in *The Power of Teacher Leaders* (2015) presenting 19 chapters for understanding the ways that teacher leaders foster positive change in their schools. This publication overall highlights the importance of the development of collaborative, professional cultures, with Boone (2015) focusing on teacher leaders as school reformers through focus and deliberation in their context, and

Nieto (2015) calling for teaching to be treated as an ethical endeavour with the importance of teachers knowing themselves and their effects on others. In conclusion it is worth noting that school leaders and teachers the world over have one thing in common, student learning and achievement. Thus, we are more than ever convinced that teacher leaders and their principals must deliberate and strategise together for the provision of optimum arrangements and opportunities that lead pedagogical enhancement through a school wide approach. Moreover, teacher leaders and principals must work mutualistically developing a culture of relational trust and hope with an agreed school vision for leading pedagogical enhancement.

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