**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND**

**Ah-ha! A** Ⅽ𝐿𝑈𝐸:
Identifying the essence and significance
of a contextually specific meaning system in three
Australian schools engaged in on-going school
improvement

**A Dissertation submitted by**

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# Abstract

Drawing on personal experience, as well as the lived experiences of others, this thesis investigates the place that a pedagogically rich language-in-use holds in three schools striving for school improvement. This Australian research has been conducted in schools that have undertaken the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) process in an effort to improve outcomes for students. Adherence to process protocols and the use of on-going professional conversations has seen significant changes in leadership and pedagogical practices take place within these schools. A manifestation of these changes can be found in the way each school community now interacts and communicates resulting in a unique meaning system emerging which is both pedagogical and metaphorical by nature.

This thesis incorporates knowledge from a wide range of fields related to school improvement including: organisational change; workplace stress; school restructuring; school leadership; capacity building; the creation of learning communities; meaning making systems; organisational culture; and, common language as a sign of cultural identity, shared understandings and knowledge creation. The research approach lies within a view that knowledge is socially constructed and that learning is a socio-cognitive process where new knowledge is co-created through exploring understandings with others in a continual cycle of practice and reflection. The data from leaders and teachers within these schools was analysed for the lived experiences that each participant had of the language construct under investigation.

The three schools involved were Primary schools and varied considerably in their contexts, with two schools being part of a State Education system and the third being from a Catholic Education context. The two state schools are in Queensland, while the Catholic school is situated in New South Wales. At the time of data collection, the smallest school had a student population of around 70 students while the largest had approximately 480 students enrolled. Situational contexts varied from a small rural community to a large suburban one. All schools and their staff are identified by pseudonyms alone. Data were collected through individual interviews with teachers and school leaders, group sessions with school staff and classroom observations of

general classroom practice focussing on the visual and verbal language on display. In addition the multifaceted texts of each school, such as newsletters, websites, posters, display boards, and other cultural artefacts, were analysed for their contribution to the meaning system under investigation.

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was taken to explore these experiences.Within this approach, the works of Merleau-Ponty, Dilthey, Ricouer and van Manen have been drawn upon and combined to produce a distilling process that reduces the multiple voices within the data down to the essence of the phenomenon in question - thus answering the over-arching research question: What is the underlying significance of a contextually constructed language-in-use within the life-world of three Australian schools engaged in on-going school improvement?

The findings of this research are substantial as they point the way to the elusive goal of sustainable school improvement made possible through cultural change processes which facilitate and are facilitated by a contextually specific meaning system. The underlying pre-requisites for the development of such a meaning system are closely tied to the school improvement process itself and the development of distributed leadership practices which in turn lead to the building of a new school culture. In addition contributions are made to the field of hermeneutic phenomenological research and communication theory.

# Certification of Dissertation

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this thesis are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.


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Signature of Candidate  Date


ENDORSEMENT


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# Acknowledgements

The other, and the most profound event of all, was becoming the facilitator of the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) project within my school. IDEAS is a process of school renewal led by the inspirational Emeritus Professor Frank Crowther and the ever caring and equally inspirational Associate Professor Dorothy Andrews and their dedicated team of professionals within the Leadership Research International group at the University of Southern Queensland. Each of the LRI team, right from the beginning, embraced me as one of their own and offered friendship, support, trust and the occasional prod, not to mention a shoulder to cry on (sorry about the wet shoulder Joan). So a big thank you, and a hug, goes to Joan, Shauna, Marlene, Mark, Allan, and Shirley.

Just as this learning journey was drawing to a close the ICT gremlins wreaked their havoc. If it were not for the assistance of Kerry - a University of Southern Queensland ICT guru - the last stretch would have been exceedingly painful. So I must thank Kerry for her patience, support and wonderful good humour.

Now to my supervisors Associate Professor Dorothy Andrews, my supervisor, and Dr. Marian Lewis, my associate supervisor - it is to them that I owe my largest debt of gratitude. Together they have patiently prodded, provoked and encouraged me along this doctoral journey. I have learnt so much from them both and the intellectual stimulation and friendship they have so unstintingly bestowed on me has been inspirational in itself. No PhD student could have had better mentors and I remain in awe of their intelligence, wisdom and kindness. Thank you!

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**UNIQUE TERMINOLOGY**

**Cognitive alignment**

*Cognitive alignment* is one of the elements referred to by Crowther et al. (2011) when exploring the concept of organisational alignment or coherence. It is closely linked to the concept of organisational cognisance where collectively derived understandings and meanings become embedded in individuals' thought processes leading to enhanced connectivity between members of a professional learning community (Jeyaraj, 2011). I see this concept as being similar to the concept of shared mental models (Lakomski, 2001; Senge, 1990) allowing for action and understanding to occur schoolwide rather than in isolated pockets.

**Domains of 'Place'**

The three domains of place are physical, relational, and cognitive. They evolve out of the establishment of spaces where connections are first made on 'neutral ground' so to speak but develop as professional conversations and collective commitment to improvement takes thinking and acting to another level.

**Essence**

'Essence' is viewed in the phenomenological sense as being that which lies at the heart of a lived experience and is therefore central to the underlying meaning of such experience (Husserl, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1997).

**Essence descriptor**

Essence descriptors are confirmed 'Indicators of Essence' (see definition below), but only a part of the essence in its entirety.

**'Indicators of Essence'**

In the search for the 'Essence' of the phenomenon in question a number of indicators appeared as the analysis/interpretation unfolded. Each of these was inserted into the text as a broken text box within which the Indicator of Essence was then numbered and described.

**Language-in-use**

Language-in-use was coined to indicate the everyday language heard in a school - in classrooms, offices, meetings, playgrounds and the like. It does not refer to more structured or systemic forms of communication but instead to a co-constructed meaning system used within everyday dialogue and which is captured within well used multifaceted texts within the school.

**Life-world**

'Life-world' is related to Husserl's (1936) understandings of how we define our world according to our lived experiences of self, body and relationships.

**Mental Stereo Imaging**

Mental Stereo Imaging refers to the type of communicative representation that conveys a dual meaning.The terminology relates to Ricouer's (2003) understanding of the stereo nature of metaphor. However, in the context of the current research project it means any form of meaning making that conjures up dual intent, for example, the meanings of genuine metaphors (the major component of mental stereo imaging), analogies, similes, symbols, acronyms or even jingles that associate a commonly held interpretation with a different meaning when seen or heard.

**Metastrategic leadership**

Crowther et al. (2011) defines the metastrategic leadership role as possessing five core functions: envisioning inspiring futures; aligning key institutional elements; enabling teacher leadership; building synergistic alliances; and, culture building and identity generation.

**Multifaceted language – multifaceted texts**

Multifaceted language relates back to the forms of communication referred to in the language-in-use definition and utilised at different organisational layers, for many different purposes and by staff, students and parents. The multifaceted language that formed the basis of the data collected in this study was built from words, visual images, learning space designs, song lyrics, body language and verbal intonations, all of which are the individual multifaceted texts which make up the multifaceted language construct.

*(It would have been possible to use the term multimodal text but due to its undertones of a multiliteracies approach to language analysis I wished to avoid indicating that the current research approach used this particular theoretical lens to any great extent.)*

**Narratives of Significance**

'Narratives of Significance' is a term used to explain the reconstructed stories of each of the respondents according to their roles and context. They are not direct sections taken from participant transcripts but are a result of the reduction process from which themes and key messages were extracted from the transcripts and then drawn together to create an overarching narrative. Within these narratives direct quotes from transcripts appear as italicised words within the main text.

**Organisational alignment**

Within this thesis organisational alignment has the same meaning as Crowther et al.'s (2011) Organisational Coherence which consists of two elements: "the first of which relates to an organisation's structures and the second of which relates to processes of cognition" (p. 50).

**Parallel leadership**

The definition of parallel leadership is taken straight from the work of Crowther, Ferguson and Hann (2009). "Parallel leadership is a process whereby teacher leaders and their principals engage in collaborative action to build school capacity. It embodies three distinct qualities – mutual trust, shared purpose, and allowance for individual experession" (p. 53).

**Zone of Resonance**

Senge (2006) speaks of a resonance or synergy which develops in an organisation where those within the organisation are working towards the same goals, the same vision. I have taken Senge's concept of resonance to explain what happens as a school begins to align its practices with its vision and I have called this the *Zone of Resonance*. It is this resonance that permeates a school resulting in shared ways of thinking and acting unconsciously surfacing across the campus.

# Prelude

As with any PhD student setting out on a journey into the unknown, it was difficult to know where my current research project would lead, or even which path or multiple pathways it might follow. What I did have to hold onto at the beginning, and on which I relied throughout, was my toolkit of knowledge, experience and passion for learning that had been accrued over a 25 year teaching career.

While a teacher, two collaborative pedagogical projects triggered significant changes in the way in which I subsequently viewed the world and my role as a teacher within it. These projects were a Multiliteracies Action Research project (Anstey & Bull, 2007) and the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) school improvement project (Andrews, 2011), the latter of which will be explored in greater detail throughout this thesis. Both projects were conducted at Forrester Hill State School in Queensland, Australia, where I was a music teacher at the time. Both have contributed significantly to how I viewed and then interpreted the data collected as a part of this research endeavour.

Prior to engagement with Multiliteracies Action Research and the IDEAS process my understanding of the teaching world, and the role I should play within it, was one where I went to school and to the best of my ability connected with my students and shared with them my love of learning, English, visual arts and music. These had been the areas in which I had been trained and had worked for over 20 years. How I taught and even what I taught was largely my own business. I did adhere to the syllabus guidelines but in reality no-one would have known that. I taught within the four walls of my classroom and had little to no interaction with my colleagues. I would have considered myself to be a 'good' teacher who achieved above satisfactory outcomes for my students in relation to their ability to learn and enjoy music.

However, my conception of what quality teaching practice should entail changed dramatically after involvement with the two professional learning opportunities identified previously. Collaboration was 'the name of the game' and working and talking best practice pedagogy with colleagues saw the four walls of the classroom begin to dissolve. I began to plan music activities in light of what teachers were planning in their classroom units of work. Music became a means of integrating into

my previous teaching practices digital technologies and concepts from a variety of subject areas, such as studies of the environment or scientific and contextually specific concerns, with the intent being to make music learning 'authentic' in the eyes of the students. It was no longer possible to plan in isolation and the richness of the learning that was occurring for both students and teachers ensured that I and many of my colleagues would never wish to return to what had once been accepted as common practice.

After the Multiliteracies Project ended, the IDEAS learning journey continued to unfold, as did the school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles (SWP) developed as a part of the process. As the school community critiqued its practices and planned for improvements, such plans were judged in light of how best we could move forward to achieve our school's vision of a quality education for 'our students' in 'our context'. Words and images related to the vision, values and SWP became highly visible in the multifaceted texts of our school.

The visibility of these texts and the contextually specific language-in-use of which they were a part, were noted by visitors to the school and frequently commented upon. This brought into my consciousness the powerful and possibly unique nature of what had evolved as we worked together as a learning community. The language and its meanings had been co-created. I began to see that this contextually specific language was a significant component of what it meant to be a part of the school community.

The shared understandings that we had developed within our school were the result of the work we were doing in relation to school improvement. Once shared openly and represented as words, visuals, and songs, they became 'identifiers' or 'symbols' which others new to our context either related to, or could ask questions about, in order to find out more about who we were and what we valued. They were representations of strongly held beliefs by our community members as a whole.

As a school community, we were proud of what and who we had become, but also saw the journey as being a never ending one, as there were always improvements to be made. This in itself had been a major movement forward in our thinking and

planning as a community. We now set long term goals and saw the need to be continually changing our practices to meet the variety of student needs which seemed to be expanding on a daily basis. While this learning community continued to evolve, we had been confronted with a number of significant changes to school personnel, as well as to our student cohort. I too had made the decision to pursue study and left the school.

These ongoing change events raised the following questions: How might continuity of best practice over time be achieved? How might the meaning system change? Would the school improvements achieved to date be maintained? Were the answers to these questions in some way tied to the characteristics of the meaning system itself?

With these tentative questions in mind and in conjunction with my strong awareness of the meaning system already identified, I pursued my desire to investigate the place that our contextually specific language-in-use played within our school community. In turn, this led to a desire to see whether or not this language construct was 'unique' to our context because there appeared to be similar meaning making systems developing in other IDEAS schools. If so, were they as significant within the 'life-worlds' of their community members as ours appeared to be?

And so the journey to find answers began...

# CHAPTER 1 : THE INTRODUCTION

**Reflection – The journey begins**

*One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things.*

Miller, 1957, p. 25
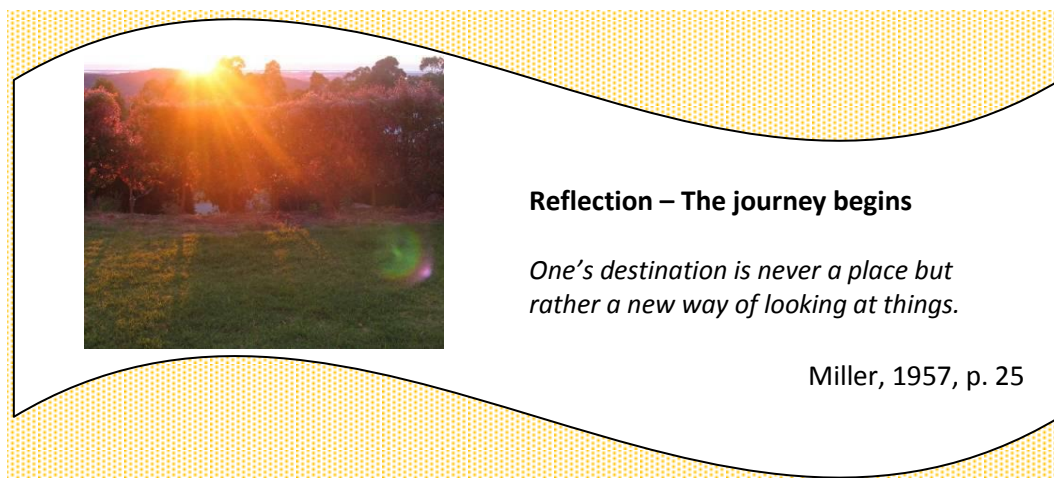
This research journey was one that grew from a seed of an understanding germinated within a school based learning community. The research was conducted in three Australian schools, and it was the lived experiences of school practitioners that formed the wealth of data central to this research. A passion for education, schools and learning nurtured this research along the way. I sought to understand how school improvement was possibly being enhanced by contextually specific meaning sytems. These contextually specific meaning systems appeared to strengthen school communities enabling them to embrace the need to change the ways in which they worked, in order to improve student outcomes.

Across Australia, and the rest of the world, schools are continually being challenged to improve outcomes for the students who sit within their classrooms. The push towards high levels of accountability has seen a greater focus than ever placed on the need for significant change to occur in the way that schools, and their teachers, address the learning needs of students, students who live in a world of constant change (Hattie, 2009). Degenhardt and Duignan (2010, p. 11) summarise this as "earth is changing, life is changing, society is changing, adolescents and their families are changing, learning is changing" thus teachers and schools must change. It is acknowledged that schools as a whole must improve their practices, and that the capability of our schools to meet the needs of today's students is ultimately dependent on the quality of their teaching staff (Caldwell & Harris, 2008).

Over the last ten to fifteen years, research undertaken in the field of school improvement and effectiveness (for example, school leadership, professional learning communities, quality pedagogical practices in schools, and the attributes or qualities of the effective teacher) has indicated that an important element of sustainable school improvement is the building of teacher capacity through collaboration (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Crowther & Associates, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2007; Hipp & Huffman, 2007; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

As teachers come together to share best practice and together learn new ways of working, learning communities may be created (Hord, 2003; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2007; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 1990). Such learning communities play a key role in the quest for improved school outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Kruse, Seashore Louis, & Bryk, 1994). Effective learning communities are dependent on high levels of trust and collaboration which are built from deep professional discussions (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2002; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). Making meaning through focussed dialogue and the constructive critiquing of pedagogical practices encourages double-loop learning to take place thereby increasing professional effectiveness (Argyris & Schön, 1974). In light of this, effective communication plays an unprecedented role in the drive for collaborative development, transmission, acquisition and adoption of the contextualised professional knowledge required for living, teaching and learning in a 'knowledge economy' (Fullan, 2001a; Hargreaves, 2003a; Owens, 2004). And yet, although there exists a strong consciousness of the changes happening within our schools, there is still much to be done in relation to understanding how sustainability of school improvement can be assured.

## 1.1 Background to the Research

The phenomenon at the centre of this research is a specific type of communication system developing within some Australian schools as they strive for school improvement. An example of this unique communication system had emerged at Forrester Hill State School some years after the community had committed itself to a process of school improvement. Visitors to the school, including supply teachers, volunteers, and new parents, had noted that students and staff talked about 'the

PODS chart' and 'roots' and that these seemed to be linked to the school values that were displayed in classrooms, the office and the library. They also linked these references to the Jacaranda tree images that adorned the school and many were curious to find out more.

At the time I was teaching music in the school and had become a facilitator of the school improvement process called Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) (Crowther, 1999).
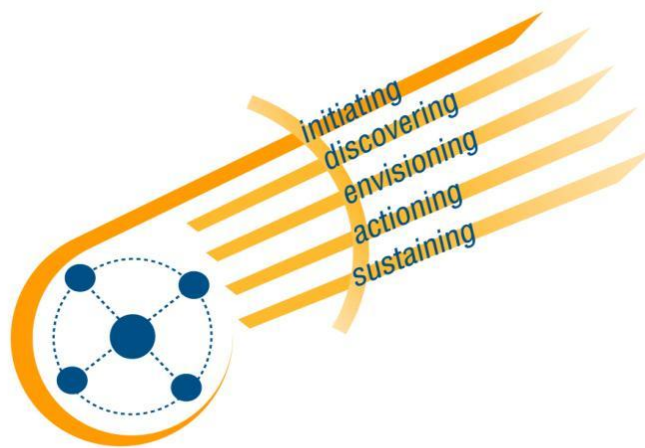


Figure 1.1 The Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools Process. Taken from D. Andrews, 2011, PowerPoint Slide 35.

As illustrated in Figure 1.1 the process consists of five phases (Andrews et al., 2004):

1. the **i**nitiating phase (the school community is introduced to the why, what, how and who of the process);

2. the **d**iscovering phase (the school community learns as much as possible about its clientele and present beliefs and practices through the completion and analysis of a Diagnostic Inventory);

3. the **e**nvisioning phase (the school community as a whole creates a 'vision' and set of schoolwide pedagogical principles that become the guide for decision making and practice within the school well into the future);

4. the **a**ctioning phase (the powerhouse of the change process heralding the onset of positive change resulting in improved student and school outcomes); and finally,

5. the **s**ustaining phase (the challenge to keep the momentum going regardless of changes to staff and clientele).

School engagement in the process entails commitment to a set of protocols called the five principles of practice – teachers are the key; professional learning is the key to professional revitalisation; success breeds success; no blame; and, alignment is a collective responsibility (Crowther & Andrews, 2003). For schools engaged in the IDEAS process these principles guide the creation of a learning partnership within the whole school community and are reinforced by the University of Southern Queensland's Leadership Research International (LRI) staff (Crowther, Andrews, Dawson, & Lewis, 2002) in conjunction with school based facilitators. As the process unfolds the core team members of the LRI lead workshops and made regular school visits over a three year period. The emphasis within the process is on reculturing and the building of parallel leadership capacity, as well as social and intellectual capacity across the whole school community (Andrews, 2008).

As a facilitator of the process, I collaborated with the Principal and other key staff members to guide the process forward and assisted with leading professional development opportunities and workshops with staff (and at times with parents). I became a school representative at IDEAS cluster meetings, where school personnel from other schools undertaking the same school improvement process gathered to learn and share experiences guided by university-based facilitators of the process.

As my IDEAS facilitator role expanded to contexts beyond Forrester Hill State School, I witnessed similar language constructs evolving in other IDEAS schools. It appeared that the presence and significance of these contextually specific meaning systems warranted investigation. In order to ascertain the role the meaning systems played within each school's 'life-world' (Husserl, 1936) , I sought to capture and co-construct the lived experiences of others, as well as document my own lived experience of this phenomenon, therefore, a first person perspective is used extensively throughout this thesis.

## 1.2 The Research Focus

The focus of the current research project was to ascertain the significance of each school specific language construct. I aimed to discover where the language had come from, who used it, how it was used, why it was used, what it meant, what effect it

had and how it had become embedded in a school's 'life-world'(Husserl, 1936) to the extent that others external to the school recognised its presence.

The intentional inclusion of input from teachers new to each of the three research schools was important, for "if we wish to examine the particular presuppositions that are built and shared in particular sites, one way is to look at people who are new to those sites" (Freebody & Baker, 1996, p. 148). Freebody and Baker perceive these insights into the way people in a school account for their actions in the 'here-and-now' as being of particular significance and argue that if a person remained at the school "then in time they [would] start to adapt to the understandings around them and 'enculturation' [would] occur, not just in the ways of talking but in the understandings behind the language used" (p.148). Consequently the gathering of 'new' as well as 'encultured' views was essential if the data were to represent a range of understandings about the significance of this phenomenon.

## 1.2.1 Situating the research within field

By accessing knowledge and insights from a broad range of staff, observing classroom practice and school operations in the here-and-now, and then blending this data with that of images and impressions from the field, a rich data base was collated capable of providing the understandings being sought. These understandings were utilised to determine the importance of the contextually constructed meaning system in these school communities. Furthermore, by identifying and analysing the similarities and differences between schools' experiences, an understanding of the 'Essence' of this phenomenon (in its phenomenological sense) was to be generated. This understanding could prove beneficial to both the schools involved in the research and those in other contexts. Such an understanding could only be achieved by accessing the knowledge and experiences of those working together and sharing together via this language conduit.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) posit that both reality and knowledge are socially constructed. In a similar vein socio-cultural theory sees cognitive development and therefore learning as being culturally and socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1998). By taking the stance (as I do) that both knowledge and cognition are socially and culturally constructed, the attributes of a quality communication system

become significant. Effective communication which facilitates knowledge creation and transmission strengthens cognitive and cultural understandings across a community, thus becoming a powerful force strengthening both cultural and pedagogical practices (Adamson & Chance, 1998; Andrews, 2008; Bandura, 1986; Becker, 1982).

Activities in which knowledge is developed can be viewed as being dependent on context, therefore "situations might be said to co-produce knowledge through activity. Learning and cognition, it is now possible to argue, are fundamentally situated" (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989, p. 32). I believed that it was an understanding of the 'situated cognition' being demonstrated in school communities that would unveil the significance of the meaning system phenomenon under scrutiny, as what was sought was "practice-centred knowledge, as distinct from knowledge that is abstract and de-contextualised" (Damon, 1991, p. 384).

Believing that situated thinking is grounded in historical, cultural and social-relational contexts and involves "adapting knowledge and thinking skills to solve unique problems" (McLellan, 1996, p. 9) I had expectations that evidence of contextually specific adaption and actioning of knowledge (sourced both externally and internally) would be uncovered in each school context. The importance of these contextually framed practices, along with interpretations derived from other multifaceted data sources, formed the 'ground' from which I anticipated that the 'Essence' of the phenomenon would emerge.

Taking a sociocultural perspective of language use implies that meaning is created within a specific cultural context (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978; 1987). This constructivist perspective blends well with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) insights into language as a process where expression in any manner or context "brings meaning into being" (p. 183). What required investigation were the characteristics of a multifaceted language built from the interplay between multifaceted texts (or forms of expression) and the users of such texts, within a specific context.

On identifying with a socio-cultural stance in relation to knowledge acquisition and language use, the importance of social cognitive theory emerged as further

explanation of how socially situated cognition takes place. Social cognitive theory evolved from the social learning theory proposed by Miller and Dollard (1941) and demonstrates that human development, adaption and change are triggered by individual and collective agency (Vygotsky, 1987). Social cognitive theory distinguishes between "personal agency exercised individually; proxy agency in which people secure desired outcomes by influencing others to act on their behalf; and collective agency in which people act in concert to shape their future" (Bandura, 2002, p. 269). Within this study, I make the assumption that this triangulated blending of personal, proxy and collective cognitive agencies are fundamental to the co-construction and use of a language or meaning system within varying contexts.

My desire to investigate the origins and importance of the meaning system at the heart of this research project led to an exploration of the literature related to educational change; school improvement; school culture; capacity building; the role learning communities play in school improvement; organisational metaphors and their cultural meanings; and finally, the role played by a shared language within culture building processes. It was at this point that the available literature narrowed to reveal the direction this investigation into a shared language-in-use would take, as there was little in the literature that pertained to a holistic view of the everyday language characteristics of school communities striving for on-going improvement.

Generally, research into daily language use is restricted to more linguistic studies of human discourse, or written texts, in relation to language nature, structure, grammatical features, functionality and how these may be modified for different purposes (for example, Gee, 1990; Halliday, 1973; Murphy & Kandill, 2004; Olsen, 1994; Stockwell & Minkova, 2001). Examples of narrower microcosms of research into teacher talk can be found related to specific types of pedagogy and practice, for example, the exploration of teacher talk which conveys values and social perspectives enhancing learning and student contribution to society (Lovat, 2005; van Manen, 2000); and, the language of proactive rather than reactive behaviour management (Glasser, 1998; Woolfolk et al., 2007).

Second language acquisition has its own wealth of literature around teacher talk regarding the best pedagogical strategies to take in such contexts (Ellis, 2001, 2002;

Norris & Ortega, 2000; Schmidt, 1990; Spada, 1997). Van Manen (1991, 2002) explores teacher talk from a broader pedagogical view relating what teachers say to pedagogical tact and the tone of teaching. Literature also exists that explores teacher talk in relation to reflective teaching practice (Anderson, 1995; Edwards-Grove, 2002; Fetherstone, 2007; Glatthorn, 1995).

Research into the language of explicit teaching tends to focus on specific key learning areas and the explicit teaching of literacy in particular has a broad and comprehensive research base (Christie & Derewianka, 2008; Freebody, Ludwig, & Gunn, 1995; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Palincsar & Brown, 1985). However, it was difficult to find literature related to a holistic view of the daily spoken language within a school community, or how such a language construct may or may not, reflect 'the way we do things around here' (school culture) or the role it may play in cultural change, school improvement and sustainability.

With change pressures increasing (Galton, 2008; Sleigh, 2008), and school improvement being the aspiration of educational systems around the world, further insights into how to deal proactively with change and how to develop supportive school cultures are judged to be important (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2004). Therefore, I believed that, as schools and their leaders seek to proactively embrace the change challenge, clarification of a meaning system capable of perhaps assisting such aspirations to be attained, warranted further investigation.

## 1.2.2 Connecting 'language-in-use' to culture

Although the multifaceted language forms within the schools involved in this study were under examination (for example, pictures, wall murals, posters, websites, pamphlets, inspirational quotes and meeting notes), it was the daily 'language-in-use' that was under the most intense scrutiny. In this current research project 'language-in-use' indicates the language that 'lives' within a community. It is not a formal language, although there are elements of commonly accepted formalities embedded within it. In the context of this study it is the language that is apparent – both seen and heard – within a school office, staffroom, classroom, parent meeting, student discussion, and/or playground.

It is the language of lived experience – of thought, action, interaction and reflection – that is explored through an interpretive approach to understanding the whole of a language construct rather than its parts. It is not a discourse analysis approach to language usage (examining in detail sounds, symbols, patterns of thinking and behaviours), highlighting social cognitive realisations by and for individuals and groups (Gee, 1996; Johnstone, 2002). Discourse analysis explores in detail written, spoken and to some extent gestural texts, deconstructing and reconstructing the underlying social structures within such texts.

The hermeneutic phenomenological approach takes this research beyond discourse analysis of , as the phenomenon under scrutiny required examination as a whole entity. Parts are examined as characteristics of a whole language, in the same way one would view a collage placed within its specific context and from where the whole can be thought of as a harmony of thought and reality, and representative of the culture from where the images and its parts originate (Geertz, 1973; Whorf, 1956). Culture lies not just in the head and heart but is a phenomenon that rests, through language, in the public domain. "Culture is public, because meaning is" (Geertz, 1973, p. 12).

Schein (1992) identifies organisational culture as having three distinct levels: the artefacts level, where concrete representations of a culture can be clearly seen; the espoused values level, which is related to goals, strategies, and philosophies; and the basic underlying assumptions level, where tacit and taken for granted assumptions ultimately guide practice.

In order to explore the language-in-use phenomenon it was necessary to go beyond the most visible layers of cultural identity, such as the visual artefacts which abound within the majority of schools. Although artefacts would play a role within my current research, it was evidence of the values and assumptions that 'lived' within each school's multifaceted language-in-use that was sought. In metaphorical terms it was the 'stitching' that held the fabric of each community together that was under investigation, and not words or symbolic manifestations confined to a document or report which played no obvious role in daily communicative practice.

## 1.2.3 Seeking 'Essence'

Seeking the 'Essence' that made each school's lived experience of the language construct unique, demanded an exploration of what was unfolding in relation to the synergy between language, meaning, understanding and practice at each site. With Schein's (1992) levels of cultural manifestation in mind, it was tacit understandings associated with deeper values, beliefs, and assumptions, as reflected in daily conversations (and portrayed by other frequently used representations of these) that would be sought as indicators of phenomenological 'essence' (Heidegger, 1962; Husserl, 1931). 'Essence' would in turn be indicative of the concept of a 'life-world' (in a school context) as the ground of shared experiences (Husserl, 1936). These phenomenological concepts of 'Essence' and 'life-world' are fundamental to the current research endeavour and my understanding of these was further clarified by the work of Dilthey (1976), Merleau-Ponty (1964), and Schütz and Luckmann (1973). Both 'Essence' and 'life-world' would, I felt, be reflected in the language-in-use and ultimately be indicative of how a collaborative school community communicates effectively and allowing the transmission of school cultural characteristics to those new to a school. Ambiguity of meaning can thus be avoided and shared understandings of best practice are more likely to be achieved.

By discovering the themes emergent from the shared lived experiences of educators living and working with a contextually specific language-in-use within their public domains (schools), I aimed to capture the 'essence' of what such a language construct meant to both individuals and the collective. I wanted to discover "that which makes a thing what it is (and without which it would not be what it is)" (van Manen, 1997b, p. 177). I sought to capture the "mind, thoughts, consciousness, values, emotions, actions, and purposes, which (find) their objectifications in language, beliefs, arts and institutions" (van Manen, 1997b, p. 3) and which Dilthey (1976) called *Geist*. These were placed in perspective by exploring the phenomenon in its 'natural' contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). To achieve this, the users of the language needed to be interviewed, recorded and observed 'in the field' (Posner, 1996) while the visual manifestations of this language-in-use would be photographed and analysed in order to investigate the role they played.

### 1.2.4 The research questions

An overarching question was formulated to guide the research journey and three sub-questions formulated to guide the stages of the journey and to clarify the role of the researcher:

**The main question:**

What is the underlying significance of a contextually constructed language within the life-world of three Australian schools engaged with the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) process of on-going school improvement?

**The sub-questions:**

1. What are the fundamental characteristics of a contextually specific language-in-use within the lived experiences of three Australian school communities that have undertaken the IDEAS process of school improvement?

2. Of what significance is the presence and utilisation of this language within the 'life-world' of the educators at these schools?

3. How can understanding the essence of such a language be of practical use in other contexts?

### 1.2.5 The researcher challenge

The challenge of answering the research questions through representing the 'lived experiences' of others was a complex one due to my own lived experience of the phenomenon. I remained continually conscious of the need to suspend (as much as was possible) my preconceptions and assumptions, as they may have 'coloured' my understandings of what had occurred and my interpretations of the role the phenomenon played (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, as in my own case, research has shown that self-study of experiences in schools is usually derived from a belief by teachers that something of importance is occurring with regard to their own practice or the practices that surround them (Berry, 2007; Dinkelman, Margolias, &

Sikkenga, 2006). By sharing my personal insights, I wish to raise the awareness of others (Brandenberg, 2008) to the significance of a contextualised 'language-in-use' within schools.

## 1.3 Placing the Phenomenon in Context

Having taught for 25 years in various contexts and witnessed and participated in many changes within the educational environment, I had become acutely aware of the pressures being placed on teachers, leaders and education systems. However, since the school in which I worked had participated in the school improvement process called IDEAS, system wide changes had taken place. These changes, although vast in implication and application, were having less of a debilitating effect on staff morale at my school than previously experienced.

 Staff members appeared to possess a different mindset and, as a whole, were no longer intimidated by new initiatives. The mood and conversations within the staffroom had changed significantly. Increasingly teacher knowledge of curriculum content, student needs and varying pedagogical practices was being shared. A general change in pedagogical focus to learning rather than just teaching took place. This changing cultural context was the cauldron from which a contextually specific language-in-use had emerged. It was this language construct that I had become consciousness of throughout 2007, as visitors to the school commented on the special feel of the place.

### 1.3.1 The school contexts

Personnel from three schools participated in this research project. Each school was chosen for its differences as much as its similarities. All three are primary schools catering for both boys and girls. The schools vary in size and two schools are from the Queensland State Education system and the third is from the Sydney Catholic Education system. Students come from a variety of family backgrounds ranging from a small farming community through to a culturally diverse urban community.

Throughout this thesis all three schools are identified by pseudonyms as are the three or four key personnel interviewed from each school. The first of these schools is

Forrester Hill State School where I had taught for over 10 years. The school is situated on the outskirts of a large regional city in South-East Queensland. Demographically children attending the school come from a wide range of backgrounds with the school being situated between a new sub-division of land acreage with affluent families moving into the area and a suburb with a high proportion of government subsidised housing and many low income families. Attached to the school is a Special Education Unit which supports over 60 students out of the 480 currently enrolled. The school had commenced its IDEAS school improvement journey in 2003 as one of a cluster of 13 schools in the region whose principals had committed their schools to the process as a means of improving school outcomes. At the time of data collection Forrester Hill had been engaged with the process for between seven and eight years.

The second school from which data were collected, Sunny Fields State School, is a small rural school in a fertile valley situated in South-East Queensland. It too is a school run by the State Education Department and possessed a student population of 69 at the time of data collection. Three full-time teaching staff, one of whom is a teaching-principal, work at the school. Relationships between the school and the school community were strained and, in 2006, the Principal made the decision to engage with the process because of its focus on collaboration with the community. Being a small school was challenging, as even small fluctuations in numbers can mean the difference between maintaining the three teaching staff and losing a teacher. It was soon after commencing the IDEAS school improvement process that numbers dropped and one teacher had to leave. After a period of 18 months numbers at the school rose again and this same teacher returned to Sunny Fields. Her insights into the changes that had taken place over that interim period of time add valuable insights to the findings.

The third school community involved in this research is that of St. Monica's Primary School. St. Monica's is a school with a culturally diverse population of around 310 students. It is a Catholic Education school situated within a busy outer-Sydney suburb and is situated on a hill overlooking a main railway line, commercial properties and suburban housing estates. St. Monica's commenced the IDEAS school improvement process as one of the alternatives offered by the Catholic Education

System to facilitate professional development focussed on improving learning outcomes. Staff at the school had strong social relationships; many had long term associations with one another, and were united within their community by their Catholic faith. At the time of data collection the Principal who had initiated the IDEAS process within the school was ill and the then Acting Principal had been a key IDEAS facilitator in her past role as Assistant Principal. Soon after data collection commenced she was formally appointed as Principal.

It is the lived experiences of the personnel working in these three schools that form the basis of the data bank from which this research draws its conclusions. In addition representations of meaning taken from a variety of texts within each site add additional insights into both past and current aspects of each school context.

## 1.4 A Brief Introduction to the Methodology

The research methodology utilised to explore my own and others' experiences is based on exploring lived experience from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. Hermeneutic phenomenology has its traditions within the philosophical work of Husserl (1982), whom some call the father of phenomenology (Rutt, 2006), and that of Sartre (1956) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), along with the hermeneutical perspectives of Heidegger (1962, 1994) and Gadamer (1975, 1976).

Husserl (1967) saw phenomenology as a philosophical stance. In the social sciences Orth (1973) applied phenomenology as an analytical approach to linguistics. Moustakas (1994) uses phenomenology as a research methods framework that "is developed solely to illuminate the question, and provides a portrayal of the phenomenon that is vital, rich and layered in its textures and meanings" (pp. 58-59). Polkinghorne (1989) utilised phenomenology as a means of exploring the experience of "those essential structures that are inherent in consciousness" (p. 42). Ricouer (1974) took a philosophical stance and utilised a phenomenological approach to the exploration of will and the expression of embodied consciousness.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe phenomenology as an inquiry paradigm or theory whereas I am more inclined to view the approach as a philosophical and pedagogical way of conducting research in a similar way to van Manen1(997a). Of

the many phenomenological voices that I listened to, it was that of van Manen that most influenced my approach to hermeneutic phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) states that "phenomenology asks for the very nature of a phenomenon for that which makes a some-'thing' what it is" (p. 10).

Hermeneutic phenomenology can be seen as both a philosophy and a method (van Manen, 1997). Hermeneutics itself has a long tradition within theological studies and later came to cover the theory of understanding and interpretation of communication, social philosophy and the concept of existence (Dilthey, 1976; Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1962). Van Manen speaks of hermeneutic phenomenology as being the interpretation of all aspects of lived experience and when he refers to phenomenology does in fact mean hermeneutic pheneomenology (van Manen, 1997). I have adopted this approach at times throughout this thesis using the full name only when wishing to emphasise the interpretive aspects of the data or findings.

To plan my research approach I read much of the work of van Manen, and other phenomenological researchers such as Langeveld (1971), Grumet (1983), and Bourke (2007). In particular it was the following explanation given by van Manen (1990) that resonated with what I aimed to achieve

> Human science… studies "persons," or beings that have the "consciousness" and that "act purposefully" in and on the world of creating objects of "meaning" that are "expressions" of how human beings exist in the world. (p. 4)

Van Manen sees phenomenology as being how one orients to lived experience, and hermeneutics as how one interprets the texts of life, as it encourages thoughtful awareness "of aspects of human life which hitherto were merely glossed over or taken-for-granted (which) will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting" (1997b, p. 154).

To adequately capture the multifaceted nature of my current research project, Dilthey's (1976) approach to human science research, Ricouer's (1973, 2003) understandings of expression, language and metaphor, and van Manen's (1990, 1997a, 2003) insights into interpreting 'lived experience' have been combined. In addition, Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenological lenses of depiction, reduction

and interpretation have been applied to the data in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the contextually specific language-in-use phenomenon currently evident in IDEAS schools.

## 1.5 The Underlying Research Structure

The flow of the research approach was channelled by Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of phenomenological reduction to "Essence" followed by applying the knowledge gained into other contexts. The first three phases of analysis equate to the use of one of the hermeneutic phenomenological lenses of depiction, reduction and interpretation adopted from Merleau-Ponty:

1. accounting for a human awareness of what is (depiction);

2. a fundamental account of how the depiction has meaning (reduction); and,

3. the concrete application to which the combined depiction and reduction point (interpretation) (Lanigan, 1997).

Figure 1.2 illustrates the phases of the data analysis process undertaken. Throughout this thesis, phases within the research process have been colour coded to allow for ease of interpretation, as have the schools themselves. The breakdown of the four phases undertaken within the study and the direction of flow are both explained in Chapter 3 when 'The Phases and Flow Model' is presented in more detail as Figure 3.3.

The analysis junctures (the change of one colour to another) translate into the transition from the use of one hermeneutic lens to another. The chapters themselves are closely related to these phases. The completion of Phase 1 (in purple) is Chapter 4 (*the Depiction*); the completion of Phase 2 (in green), *the Reduction Phase* , is broken into two parts. Part A of Phase 2 is Chapter 5, and Part B of Phase 2 is captured in Chapter 6.  Phase 3 (in red) equates to Chapter 7 (*the interpretation* of the findings into living knowledge), while Phase 4 (in black) is presented in Chapter 8. This final chapter explores *the implications* of the new knowledge emergent from this study.
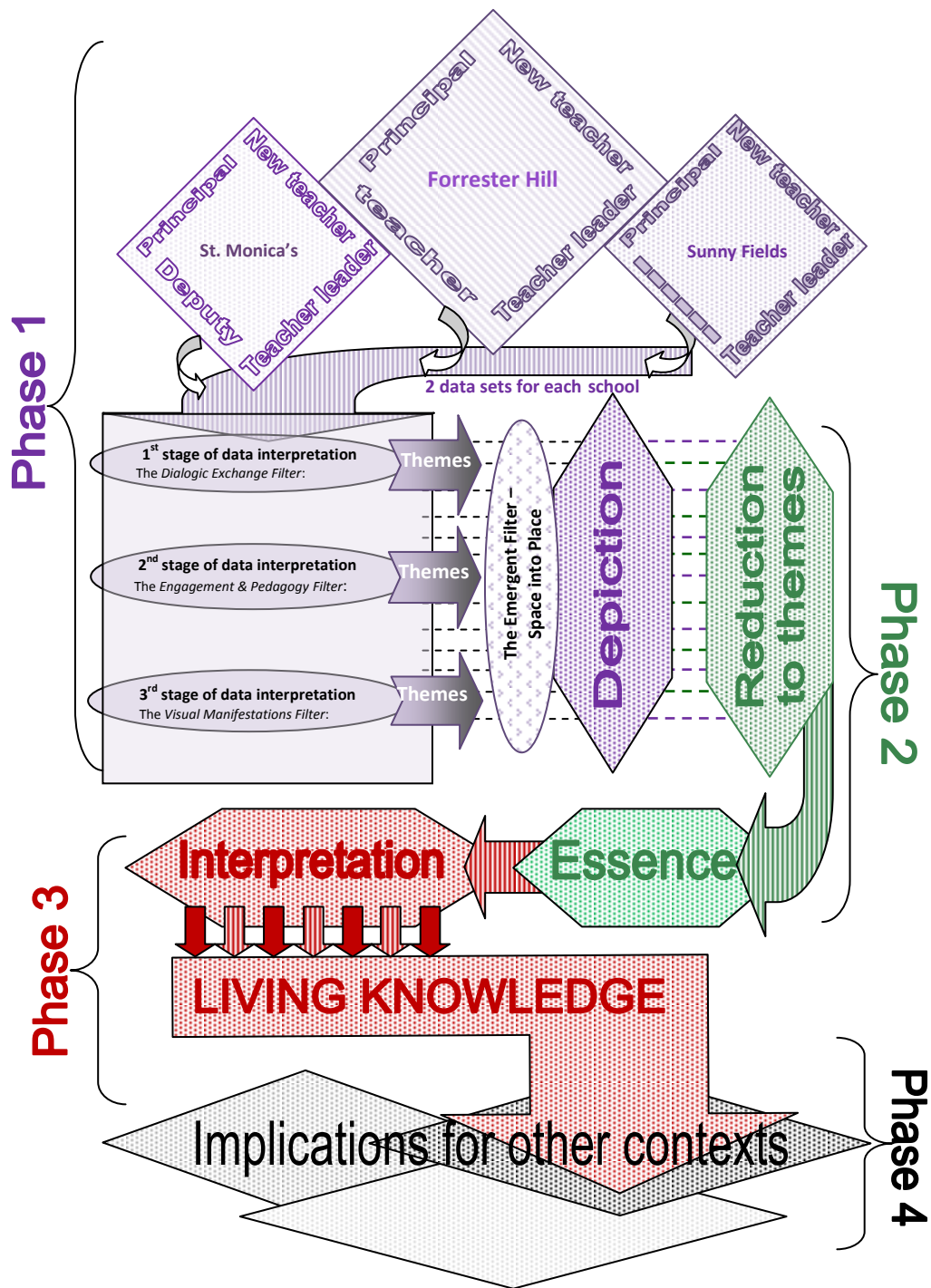
Figure 1.2 Orientation to the Phases and Flow Research Model

The more detailed version of the model (found in Chapter 3) became the guiding map of how the research analysis was conducted and how the findings are presented. Segments from within the 'The Phases and Flow Model' diagram have been used throughout the thesis to orient the reader as to the point within the process being explored at that moment within the research.

## 1.6 The Researcher Perspective

Within a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research, a strong emphasis is placed on the understanding of lived experience through interpretation. That interpretive process is fundamental to how the data are collected and then viewed which in turn influences what is deemed as significant by both the participants and me as the researcher. My involvement in the IDEAS project (Crowther et al., & Lewis, 2002), the Multiliteracies Action Research Project (Anstey & Bull, 2007), and and a love of language and its structure, 'colour' how I see and interpret the world around me. Therefore, these fundamental elements of who I am also colour my approach to data analysis.

## 1.7 Ethical Considerations and Possible Limitations

The research was to be conducted in schools, on campus, as staff and students engaged in their daily routines. Ethics approval was sought from the University of Southern Queensland and the Catholic Education Office Sydney. Written approval was given and I also received written approval from the principals of each of the schools involved.When first approached, the principals indicated their willingness to participate in the project and were willing for me to spend time in classrooms, staffrooms and generally on site. The intent of the initial research was to observe and analyse artefacts so little disruption to school routine was planned. Further clarifications of meanings and the deepening of understandings were to be conducted within discourse exchanges (both formal interviews and informal conversations) digitally recorded for later analysis.

Staff expressed satisfaction with this data collection format as it meant that exact wordings would be used in the analysis. Observations and the taking of notes within regular school staff meetings would also took place, thereby not requiring extra input by the majority of staff. Those specifically interviewed were approached due to the role they played as Principal, Assistant Principal, teacher-leader or as a teacher new to the school. These specific interviews were planned to take no more than one and a half hours and all respondents willingly agreed to the interviews. The partnership between the researcher and the school participants was seen by respondents to be mutually beneficial, as it allowed new understandings to emerge for both parties

(Abawi, 2011; Erwee & Conway, 2006; Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). My understanding of the IDEAS process, and my sound knowledge of its key principles, stages and terminology constructs would reduce the need to ask for clarification of IDEAS specific aspects that were sure to arise within the interview process.

I acknowledge that this attribute could be seen as a bias that may have coloured the research findings (Holloway, 1997). However, it is well recognised that qualitative research is indeed an interpretive process to which the researcher brings his/her own basic assumptions, political, cultural and systemic interests (Wertsch, 1998, p. 7). As Slattery, Krasney and O'Malley (2006) state

> …layers of meaning, prejudice, and intention surround all artifacts, thus necessitating a hermeneutical study to expose not only the irony of deception, but also the implications of historical analysis. Contemporary historical, textual, aesthetic, and autobiographical interpretation all acknowledge this double-edged dimension of clarity and ambiguity (p. 540)

To ensure clear pictures of lived experiences were portrayed, a conscious effort was made to guard against preconceptions and the viewing of events from the one perspective. A collective portrayal of experience was achieved by the continual cross checking and sharing of intent and interpretations among all partners in the research process (Malterud, 2001; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1999).

## 1.8 The Structure of the Thesis

As illustrated by Figure 1.2 the research exploration was conducted in four phases. These phases were closely linked to the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology itself and guided the substance contained within each of the chapters.

The chapter structure of the overall thesis is as follows:

CHAPTER 1: THE INTRODUCTION outlines the research journey in its entirety and introduces the questions pertaining to the school specific language (meaning system) phenomenon under investigation;

CHAPTER 2: THE LITERATURE REVIEW explores literature related to the field of school improvement because it is the application of the IDEAS school improvement process that has underpinned the evolution of the phenomenon;

CHAPTER 3: THE METHODOLOGY explains the research approach taken which is that of hermeneutic phenomenology. This chapter includes a description of how both data collection and analysis were carried out, as well as the reasons for presenting the findings in the manner chosen;

CHAPTER 4: THE DEPICTION explores Phase 1 of the analysis. It represents the Depiction Phase in which a number of filters were applied to the data in order to capture the initial rich descriptions or depictions of school-specific themes as well as the first indicators of phenomenological 'essence';

CHAPTER 5: THE REDUCTION PHASE Part A commences Phase 2 of the analysis where school specific themes are reduced to common themes which become further indicators of phenomenological 'Essence';

CHAPTER 6: THE REDUCTION PHASE Part B concludes Phase 2 of the analysis and sees the further 'Indicators of Essence' emerge and become either confirmed, or not, as actual components of essence. The interpretation of the evolution and facilitative aspects of the phenomenon from which the essence was derived are modelled and presented;

CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETATION INTO LIVING KNOWLEDGE – Phase 3 presents the answers to the research questions themselves which in phenomenological terms are the interpretations of the findings into living knowledge; and finally,

CHAPTER 8: THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH summarises the research findings and considers the implications of the current research project for other contexts thus completing Phase 4 and concluding this thesis.

Throughout this thesis there are a number of images and excerpts that add additional insights into the power of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach taken. There are photographs of student work, icons, or images that are particular to each school that are used to add a sense of 'being' for that school. For example, as the documentation of this current research unfolds, the imagery of BUDS indicates the use of Sunny Fields data, the use of the Jacaranda tree symbol is indicative of Forrester Hill and a kite is used to denote St. Monica's. Personal reflective excerpts are indicated by the presence of 'an eye looking through a magnifying glass'.

These additions have not been itemised or named as they are there to portray a sense or a feeling of a place, just as if the reader were to walk into each school and sense or see that which caught my eye. In this manner, I suggest that language should be multifaceted in order to fully portray meaning. As co-dwellers in a space, I believe that we absorb images and generate internal dialogues that add meaning to the world around us and they in turn are a part of the language that is used as we make sense of our world.

If these inserts had significant attention drawn to them by labelling and discussion within the main text, they would no longer blend into the presentation in the way that these images and thoughts blend into the fabric of this research. If they were removed from the chapters then the sense of 'Being' and the 'sparks of transcendence' that are illuminated by their inclusion (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962) would be diminished. They form an integral part of the fabric of this exploration and the interpretation of its findings. Each has been carefully positioned to add another layer of insight into the elusive 'Essence' of this phenomenon.

## 1.9 Thesis Summary

In summary, this thesis seeks to explore the lived experience of school personnel who live and work with a contextually specific meaning system on a daily basis. The three schools involved in this current research project had undertaken the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) school improvement process. Each possesses a clearly identifiable school vision, a set of school values

and a collectively created schoolwide pedagogical framework. These contextually specific artefacts were the first indicators of the unique meaning system under investigation.

In order to capture the lived experiences of school personnel utilising this type of meaning system, a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach was utilised. The methodological direction taken was based on the work of van Manen (1997), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Ricouer (1973), and Dilthey (1976).

With school improvement as the underlying theme, the literature review draws on an extensive school improvement literature base encompassing the specific areas of organisational change; school culture; capacity building; learning communities; meaning systems; and metaphorical meaning, as well as the current literature on 'shared language'. Integral to the presentation of data and findings within this thesis is my understanding of language as being both a product and a conduit of co-constructed meaning. Verbal and visual imagery play a major role in the creation and portrayal of the meanings and new knowledge emergent from this investigation.

# CHAPTER 2 : THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review spiral (Figure 2.1) reflects the passage of my research journey. Each layered turn opened up questions that were answered by exploring the readings within the next layer until the point was reached where the importance of a pedagogically rich common language in schools rose to prominence. With this came another set of questions that appeared to have few answers. The search for these answers required examination of the lived experience of leaders and teachers who utilised this type of

Figure 2.2 Literature Review Spiral

pedagogically rich language construct on a daily basis within their specific learning culture. The need to explore lived experience led to the use of a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach and thus to the work of Merleau-Ponty, Dilthey and van Manen whose ideas and philosophical stance resonate with my own. It is a blending of their perspectives that are reflected within the methodology.

## 2.1 The Change Challenge

**Reflection – Changing Direction**

*It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory.*

Deming, 1950, n.p.

In the workforces of the 21$^{st}$ century, the communication, social skills and ways of working that are needed are vastly different from those used within the old hierarchical format found in the industrial based era (Bull & Anstey, 1996; Cheng & Caelli, 2007; Fullan, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Drucker saw this 'new

world' as one made up of specialists brought together like members of an orchestra under the direction of their conductor, thus creating harmony or organisational alignment; "an organisation is like a tune: it is not constituted by individual sounds but by the relations between them" (Drucker, 1946, p. 26). In an aligned organisation, espoused values and visions are reflected in organisational decision making and purposeful action (Kaplan & Norton, 1996; Labovitz & Rosasky, 1997; Senge, 1992, 2006). Individual energies are harmonised in pursuit of agreed goals and

> ...a resonance or synergy develops, like the "coherent" light of a laser rather than the incoherent scattered light of a light bulb. There is commonality of purpose, a shared vision, and understanding of how to complement one another's efforts. (Senge, 2006, p. 217)

However, many would argue that it is becoming increasingly difficult for school leaders to keep their communities resonating in tune (Fullan, 2006a; Hopkins, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Futurists and educators argue that the world today poses challenges never before seen due to systems development, global issues, societal changes, and the complex variety of family structures and practices (Beare, 1995; Bierema, 1999; Drucker, 1946; Fullan, 2001b; Galton & MacBeath, 2008; Hargreaves & Mok, 2001; Mackay, 1993; Salerno & Brock, 2008; Sleigh, 2008).

Workplaces have changed. Differing forms of leadership parameters, technological innovations, ethnic blends and community accountability requirements require different organisational considerations and communicative attributes (Anstey & Bull, 1996; Buttery & Richter, 2005; Cheng & Caelli, 2007; Fullan, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Sleigh, 2008). The modern workforce must become capable of adapting, of learning, unlearning and relearning but for many change is not easy (Delors, 1996; Fiol & Lyles, 1985). The ubiquitousness of change is placing unprecedented demands on education systems, schools and their personnel (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003) with job burnout a major concern (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Rogers, 1996).

## 2.1.1 Changing imperatives for schools

Global considerations impacting on schools are proving inherently problematic with explicit solutions difficult to find and "education needs required at a national level to keep nations, like Australia, competitive into the twenty-first century have not been fully considered" (Richter & Buttery, 2004, p. 102). There has been a climate of change affecting all organisations for some time. "Now we are entering a…period of change; the shift from the command-and-control organization of departments and divisions, to the information-based organization, the organization of knowledge specialists" (Drucker, 1993, p. 356*).* But many are still not clear about how to deal with the inevitable. At times change management strategies have been less than productive and this places additional stress on management and workers, as resistance to further change efforts becomes magnified (Bordia, Restubog, Jimmieson, & Irmer, 2011; Hargreaves, 2003; Owens, 2004; Sarason, 1990; Sleigh, 2008). In schools, Owens (2004) sees that a proactive approach is necessary where "educational leaders need to develop, not responses to the urgencies of the moment but rather a set of values, beliefs, and principles to guide them in developing effective strategies and actions in the ever-uncertain future" (p. 23).

It has been said that educational authorities know the sorts of capacities that must be built in schools but that school principals, systems and policy makers still do not know how to build these capacities or how to embed quality practices and maintain improvements that might occur through reform strategies (Hargreaves, 2003a; 2007; Harris & Bennett, 2001; Hattie, 2003; Hogan, 2008; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Mitchell & Sackney, 2007; Mulford, 2004, 2007; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Sinha, 2008; Spillane, 2005). The search for ways to address the challenges facing schools continues (Fullan, Bertoni, & Quinn, 2004). Amongst the many changes that are having strong impact on schools are the societal and technological changes that abound and which have been happening for some time (Beare, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Prensky, 2001; Sleigh, 2008).

## 2.1.2 Societal and technological changes

Over the last 10 to15 years the most significant change to Australian society has been the acquisition and use of technology by its members. Although the Australian

Bureau of Statistics shows that there has been little change in the make-up of the Australian family over the last ten years, in relation to internet usage "nearly three-quarters (72%) of Australian households had home internet access in 2008-09, more than four times the proportion in 1998 (16%)" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010). The report on communication trends by the bureau states:

> In 2004-05, more than two-thirds (70%) of households accessing the Internet at home had a dial-up connection, while less than one-third (29%) reported a broadband Internet connection. By 2008-09 the situation was reversed, with 86% of households accessing the Internet at home reporting a broadband connection, while only 12% reported a dial-up connection. (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010)

With the ability to access information at the touch of a fingertip, the focus for education must no longer be on the transmission of information (Sleigh, 2008). Instead students must be taught how to critically analyse and use information and appropriately communicate considered opinions and judgements pertaining to the world around them (Anstey & Bull, 2006; Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Sleigh, 2008).

## 2.1.3 Communication in the world of the digital native

These changes in the capabilities and use of technology are obvious and "to enrich our students, we must master technology" (Sleigh, 2008, p. 3). As a result of technological innovations, social communication has taken a different format with many 'digital natives' preferring to communicate via blogs and text messages (Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007). Teachers may feel uncomfortable with technologically facilitated communication which can feel abrupt and be easily misunderstood, however, although many older teachers will remain as digital immigrants not fully assimilated into the digital world, we must still come to grips with technology in order to cognitively engage the digital natives in our classrooms (Dennison, 1999; Prensky, 2001; Sleigh, 2008). We must also teach the social attributes of a community that can communicate effectively and with respect no matter what the generational or cultural differences may be (Fisher, Dwyer, & Yocam, 1996; Gravett & Throckmorton, 2007; Prensky, 2001; Wallington, 2002).

Social commentators and educators (Bohannor, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Gelston, 2008; Jayson 2006; Patterson, 2007; Sleigh, 2008; Wallington, 2002) speak of today's youth from polarised viewpoints. Sleigh (2008) sees today's students as being reluctant to take risks mainly due to increasing levels of insecurity which can be attributed to changes in family structures, income levels, feelings of safety or the lack there of, and a lack of certainty about the sustainability of the world as we know it (p. 3). Others speak of today's generation as the brash, difficult to please, self-confident technological gurus whose loyalty is to self rather than community (Gelston, 2008; Patterson, 2007), while others contradict this view with yet another perspective. They see the Nexters as being better educated, less racially prejudiced and more civic-minded and easily capable of being enthusiastic collaborative workers (Gardner, 2006; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000).

No doubt in schools there are students with a mix of all these attributes. Unfortunately, in many schools we are still teaching this complex array of students using an industrial world paradigm inadequate to meet the needs of today's students or tomorrow's world (Day, 2003a; McCrindle, 2011; Mitchell & Sackney, 2007). Ten years ago Prensky (2001) believed that "today's students *think and process information fundamentally differently* from their predecessors" (p. 1). McCrindle (2011) highlights that what worked well for students in the 20th Century was teacher-centred instruction centred on provable knowledge. Such knowledge was largely delivered verbally to students in a structured classroom setting, however, today students crave learning which is facilitated, observable and visual delivered in a spontaneous mode of learning which he called 'café style' delivery (Powerpoint, Slide 52). Unfortunately many schools fail to make meaning and be authentic learning places in the minds of today's students (Mitchell & Sackney, 2007) and reform is becoming an ongoing process which never fulfils its potential of improving outcomes for students (Cuban, 1990). It is important that teachers come to grips with more effective means of communicating ideas and sharing understandings so that lasting improvement becomes possible (Cuban, 1990; Fullan, 2001c).

## 2.1.4 Stress due to the 'change challenge'

Of all the effects of rapid change in schools, of greatest concern is the stress being manifested in both teachers and school leaders (Kyriacou, 2001; Punch & Tuetteman,

1996). In many schools personnel feel as if they are never able to get on top of their day-to-day work demands, or have the time to fully understand and develop strategies to deal with what is happening around and to them (European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), 2009; Kyriacou, 1987, 2001; Lim, 1994; Otto, 1986; Pithers & Soden, 1999; Punch & Tuetteman, 1996).

Over the last 20 to 30 years the increased stress on teachers has been well documented (Dinham, 1993; ETUCE, 2009; Howard & Johnson, 2002; Kyriacou, 2001; Pithers & Soden, 1999; Punch & Tuetteman, 1996). Findings show that teacher burn-out and work-related stress are linked with physical ill-health, mental ill-health and reduced teacher commitment and effectiveness (Blasé, 1984; Finlay-Jones 1986; Fletcher & Payne, 1982; Hartsuyker, 2007; Lemaire, 2010; Otto, 1986).

And it is not only teachers but school leaders who are suffering in this manner, with "more than 20% of those surveyed (in a national survey of 1097 high school principals conducted in 2008) being worried about using alcohol or prescribed medications to control stress" (Hogan, 2008, p. 17). Recently, both the Australian Government and global authorities have expressed concern over the difficulty of retaining quality teachers to meet the needs of the new millennium (ETUCE, 2009; Hartsuyker, 2007; Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2005; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2002).

The major risk factors related to organisational stress are seen to be: the culture of an organisation; the demands on the worker; the degree of control the worker has; relationships in the workplace; how change happens; clarity of worker's role; the degree of support for the worker; the amount of training; and a failure to account for individual differences (ETUCE, 2009). These same factors play a major role in the stress related issues apparent in the workplace called school (Eklund, 2009; Hargreaves, 1994; Little & Horn, 2007; Owens, 2004; Smiley, Mirezky & Konkol, 2004). Efforts to deal with these concerns have seen major restructuring efforts being undertaken in school communities with a focus being placed on collaborative approaches to building teacher and leadership capacities where school personnel feel supported in their endeavours and whole school approaches to challenges are developed (Fullan, 2001; Hill & Crevola, 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

## 2.2 School Improvement



**Reflection – Creative Growth**

*Life is much less a competitive struggle for survival than a triumph of cooperation and creativity.*

Capra, 1996, p. 243
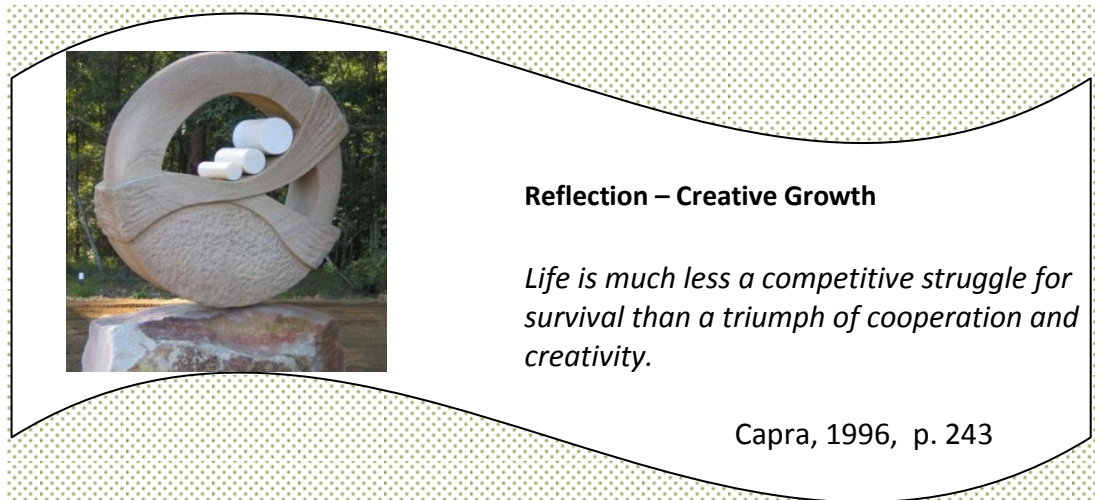
The impacts of change have forced governments and educational institutions to address the issues confronting education through restructuring schools and leadership parameters. "The processes of becoming – of people growing and developing as individuals and groups, and of the organization doing so as well – combine to create the essence of enduring vitality in organizational life" (Owen, 2004, p. 22). The restructuring occurring at present within many organisations is an attempt to tackle the discontinuity which often accompanies change (Goswani, 2002; Limerick, Cunnington, & Crowther, 1998; Robbins, Millet, & Water-Marsh, 2004; Owens, 2004). Many of these changes are so fundamental that the new ways of working and 'being', such as the development of parallel leadership (a form of distributed leadership capacity as depicted in Figure 2.2), have transformed schools.
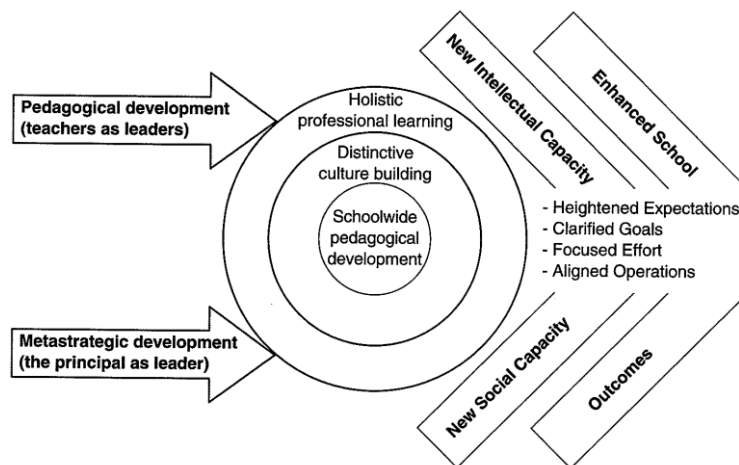


Figure 2.1 Linking Parallel Leadership and Successful Capacity Building. Taken from F. Crowther, M. Ferguson, and L. Hann, 2009, p. 60

As Figure 2.2 depicts, mutualistic leadership partnerships between principals and teachers see a greater emphasis being placed on pedagogical and metastrategic development which translates into growth of both intellectual and social capacity. In turn this leads to improved school outcomes and the creation of an enhanced learning culture within the organisation called school (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009).

## 2.2.1 Organisational perspectives

Developing organisations that are capable of embracing change strategies in order to meet changing needs, and thereby improve organisational outcomes, has been the focus of much research over recent years. Organisational theories such as 'modern', 'post modern', 'structural', 'human resource', 'political', 'cultural', and 'systems' can be used as frames through which to view the organisational world and organisational change (Bell, 1973; Burns & Stalker, 1995; Hatch, 2006; Robbins et al., 2004; Tosi, Risso, & Carroll, 1986). From an 'open-systems' perspective, "if organisations are machines, control makes sense. If organisations are process structures, then seeking to impose control through permanent structure is suicide" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 23).

Although similar in some ways to many organisations in regards to structures, processes and individuals needs and interactions, there is a distinct uniqueness to educational institutions and

> if we want to make a difference in the organization we call school, it is first necessary to carefully make our basic assumptions manifest and consider how logical the connections are between these assumptions, our publicly espoused values and beliefs, and the organizational behaviour in which we engage in professional practice (Owens, 2004, p. 4).

Making visible the connections that Owens deems necessary is the basis from which organisational alignment can evolve (Senge, 2006). Consistent interconnections between policy, strategy and practice lead to greater levels of commitment by staff (Shcneider et al., 2003) and internal alignment within an organisation is translated into higher levels of performance (Xu, Cavusgil, & White, 2006).

Within the IDEAS process, alignment is viewed as organisational coherence and the Research Based Framework is an organisational diagnostic tool which allows schools to gain an understanding of how the many parts of the whole work together to create alignment within their school context (Andrews, 2009; Crowther & Andrews, 2003). Coherence in this sense can be seen as a network of actions and interactions, processes and structures which when applied in an open and transparent manner by a whole school community form what Limerick et al. (1998) called a *network organisation.*

## 2.2.2 Schools as network organisations

In network organisations, management is "process oriented rather than structurally oriented; it is ecologically driven rather than hierarchically driven; it is value-added rather than competitive; and it is holistic rather than functional" (Limerick et al., 1998, p. 4). Within these networks a collective understanding of vision, identity and systems of action is needed (Limerick et al*., 1998). These new organisations, including schools, are individualistic and collaborative at the same time (Crowther, Hann, & McMaster, 2001). Leadership is shared so that ongoing sustainability can occur no matter who is nominally at the top, and a culture with a focus on learning is developed (Hopkins, 2003; Owens, 2004; Senge, 1990) because as Hattie (2009) says "it is visible teaching and learning by teachers and students that make the difference" (p. 22).

Few would dispute the need for change in the way in which schools conduct their business for "we now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast with change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn" (Edersheim, 2007, p. 13). However, putting the processes in place that can develop sustainable learning cultures able to meet the challenges of change is still education systems' greatest challenge (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves, 2002; Lambert, 2010; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999). In many schools, to allow the openness and transparency needed to move a school into this new way of working requires cultural transformation (Limerick et al., 1998; Owens, 2004).

## 2.3 School Culture

In recent years, theories around organisational culture as a tool to explain human systems interaction have gained wide acceptance (Chapman, 2003; Fullan, 2001c, 2006b; Schein, 1992). Schein speaks of three levels of culture as illustrated in Figure 2.3. At the surface level are the visual artefacts which others can see but do not really know how to interpret, as they have none of the background knowledge that led to their creation. The next level encompasses the espoused values which can be evidenced in mission and vision statements. While within the third and deepest layer are the norms and assumptions that ultimately guide decision making and practice and that those new to a culture may not perceive. It is this underlying layer that Schein sees as the core of culture.
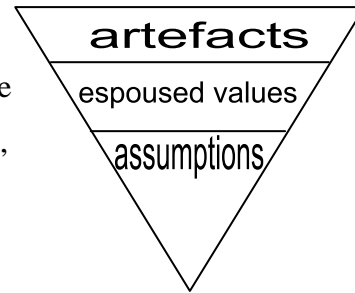
Figure 2.2 Three levels of culture

> The culture of a group can now be defined as: A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1992, pp. 373-374)

Basically organisations face two major challenges: integrating individuals into an effective whole; and adapting successfully to the external environment in order to survive (Argyris & Schön, 1979; Schein, 2002). As groups find solutions to these problems over time, a kind of collective learning evolves that creates a set of shared assumptions and beliefs which are the essence of organisational culture (Hadfield, 2003; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Schein, 2002). Since culture can be described as "an active living phenomenon through which people jointly create and recreate the worlds in which they live" (Morgan, 1997, p. 141), and culture is based on a basic pattern of shared assumptions, then Schein (1992) would say that how these assumptions are created, and by whom, is important and that "the process of culture formation is…first a process of creating a small group…[that] act in concert" (p. 212). It is into this central core that others will be drawn, as the effectiveness of new ways of thinking and doing are noticed and thus a critical mass is formed that

provides the energy and expands the relationships which in turn draws yet more individuals into the cultural change group (Durrant, 2004; Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006). As expanding numbers of people begin to think and act in concert, a new culture is built (Andrews et al., 2004).

Organisational culture can be seen to be a complex mix of basic assumptions, observed behaviours, espoused values, and shared meanings (Boufoy-Bastick, 2002; Schein, 2002; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984).Culture is influenced by, and also influences, the habits of thinking and mental models that are drawn upon (Hofstede, 1980; Lakomski, 2001; Senge, 1990; Smircich, 1983). Organisational culture can be evidenced in the language and customs of the organisation (Geertz, 1973; Schultz, 1991) and by the root metaphors that are drawn upon (Hatch, 1991; Morgan, 1980). Ultimately, however, many would say that culture is largely influenced by leadership perspective (Busche & Shani, 1991; Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; MacGregor, 1960; Schein, 1992).

## 2.3.1 Restructuring leadership roles

Leadership structures that encourage avenues of collaborative practice and open communication promote a proactive school culture and create an environment where hope can flourish and a learning organisation can evolve (Crowther, 1997; Fullan, Hargreaves, 2003; Hill & Crevola, 2006; van Manen, 1997). Leadership influence cannot be underestimated, as "although educational leaders have little ability to alter the inner drives and motivational forces of individuals in the organisation, they have considerable latitude to alter the organisational environment" (Limerick et al., 1998, p. 176). Research by Newmann and Wehlage (1995) demonstrated that "the most effective administrative leaders delegated authority, developed collaborative decision making processes, and stepped back from being the central problem solver" (p. 193). There is strong evidence to suggest that changes in leadership roles are fundamental to the process of building new collaborative cultures (Crowther & Andrews, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Lambert, 2003).

If restructuring schools requires a restructuring of leadership roles, then this is not an easy task. Such major changes often only take place during a process of whole school

restructuring aimed at counterbalancing outside forces (Cuttance, 2001). Hopkins and Jackson (n.d.) list the forces affecting schools as the following:

> ...the ubiquitousness of change; the pressures from succeeding waves of standards-based reforms; the imperative to respond to the impact of digital technologies; new understandings about the nature of learning from brain research; schooling level autonomies; workload issues; public accountability pressures; and, the expansion of paraprofessional roles. (pp. 1-2)

All these factors have led to a focus worldwide upon progressive school restructuring, redesign or re-engineering (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Lieberman & Miller, 1990).

Senge's (1990) book, *The Fifth Discipline,* placed the learning organisation at the centre of attention. Organisations began to rethink leadership, as well as cultural and productivity issues. Sweetland and Hoy (2000) consider the role of school leaders as being to ensure that teachers and students continuously learn and adapt to changing contexts. Leaders began to place importance on nurturing staff through vision development, relationships building and effective conflict resolution strategies (Cuttance, 2001; Hadfield, 2003; Hopkins, 2003; Owens, 2004). A culture built on collaboration and a sense of the importance of the collective became seen as being outstanding features that prepared teams for change implementation (Deal & Peterson, 1998; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). The ability of an organisation to be flexible, and therefore able to take on new knowledge and create new meaning, saw widespread leadership commitment to the development learning cultures.

## 2.3.2 Distributed leadership

Leadership in a change society requires flexibility, innovative thinking and collaborative decision making (Fullan, 2001b; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Harris, Day, & Hadfield, 2001; Huffman, Hipp, Pankake, & Moller, 2001; Lambert, 2003; Lambert, Collay, Deitz, Kent, & Richter, 1997; Leithwood, 1994; Tosi et al., 1986). "Educational leaders need to develop not responses to the urgencies of the moment but rather a set of values, beliefs, and principles to guide them in developing

effective strategies and actions in the ever-uncertain future" (Owens, 2004, p. 23). On the completion of a research study involving the CEOs of 50 major Australian organisations, Limerick et al. (1998) believed that organisational thinking has taken a new direction and their 'Fourth Blueprint' for workplace management involved a more holistic, empathetic, culture-sensitive approach forming the basis for new microstrategies for workplace management where leadership is carried out horizontally.

Quality leadership is essential if a school is to develop and thrive (Harris, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Huffman et al., 2001) and, furthermore, that improvement will be effective only if there is a focus on the learning occurring in classrooms (Brookfield, 1995; Cheng, 2001; Glatthorn, 1995; Good & Brophy, 2000). In an effective learning community, "leadership pervades the organization" (Huffman & Hipp, 2003, p. xvii). For leaders to have real impact they "must define their job as helping to create a professional learning community in which teachers can continually collaborate and learn how to become more effective" (Du Four & Eaker, 1998, p. 184).

Owens (2004) called for the distribution of power more equitably so "we can make the school an ever more growth-enhancing environment" (p. 22). There is growing evidence to say that there is no choice. Leadership in schools must become a shared responsibility (Chapman, 2003; Day, 2003b; Fullan, 2006b; Gronn, 2000, 2002; Hadfield, 2003a; Hargreaves, 2002; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003).

Distributed leadership comes from a different paradigm from that which framed leadership understandings of the last century (Harris, 2004; Timperley, 2005). Hallinger and Heck (1996) described the understanding about effective leadership just over ten years ago as a black box with, at that stage, findings that "reveal little about how leadership operates" (p. 18) to enhance school improvement. However, Crowther et al. (2002) provided insights into what the contents of the black box might be.

> Parallel leadership [a form of distributed leadership] engages teacher leaders and administrator leaders in collaborative action, while at the same time encouraging the fulfilment of their individual capabilities,

aspirations and responsibilities…It makes possible the enhancement of
school identity, teachers' professional esteem, community support and
students' achievements. (p. 141)

Distributed leadership requires multiple perspectives, with teachers empowered to take on leadership roles previously unknown. Roles can be process and content roles, convergent and divergent roles, task and maintenance roles as well as some roles which are yet to be defined (Limerick et al., 1998). When exploring leadership structures in schools, Spillane et al. (2001) "moved beyond acknowledging leadership practice as an organisational property in order to investigate how leadership might be conceptualized as a distributed practice stretched over the social and institutional contexts of the school" (p. 24).

Crowther and Associates (2011) highlight the value of parallel leadership in schools, where teacher leaders ensure that the school administrative load is shared and that experiences, expertise and individual strengths are fully utilised. One of the IDEAS principles of practice is that 'teachers are the key' and the IDEAS concept of parallel leadership is a basic requirement for actioning the whole process (Crowther et al., 2002). This effectively places teachers at the forefront of school planning as they work in a mutualistic partnership with the administration team (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). Parallel leadership is defined as "a process whereby teacher leaders and their principal engage in collective action to build school capacity. It embodies three distinct qualities – mutual trust, shared purpose, and allowance for individual expression" (Crowther et al., 2009, p. 53).

Within the parallel leadership partnership the characteristics of principal leadership and teacher leadership differ. Principal leadership is seen as being metastrategic and having five functions: envisioning inspiring futures; aligning key institutional elements; enabling teacher leadership; building synergistic alliances; and, culture building and identity generation (Crowther et al., 2009). While Crowther et al.'s (2009) *Teachers as leaders framework* captures the attributes of the teacher leader as being to: convey convictions about a better world; facilitate communities of learning; strive for pedagogical excellence; confront barriers of school culture; translate ideas into sustainable systems of action; and, nurture a culture of success (p. 3). The

building of differing forms of distributed leadership capacity is seen by many as being central to the building of the overall school capacity to achieve success (Dinham, 2007; Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Leadership must be more than just about principal leadership, for to create school improvement, a mutualistic partnership with teachers as parallel leaders is required (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). In schools where a parallel leadership framework is in place, teacher leaders demonstrate increased levels of professional collaboration and professional confidence, and are more prepared to lead the learning of others thus building capacity school wide (Crowther et al., 2009). For many schools the development of such distributed leadership practices goes hand in hand with the building of a new school culture.

## 2.3.2 Building new school cultures

From a holistic viewpoint, Geertz (1973) sees culture as being one with Max Weber's "webs of significance" (p. 5). These webs of significance dictate the way in which we respond to the world. A culture that respects teachers concerns, such as feelings of inadequacy, lack of time and a lack of collaborative decision making, and keeps teachers informed, goes a long way to reducing the concerns about change that many teachers express, while at the same time creating the foundations for a learning culture to emerge within a school (Hall & Hord, 1987).

Much of the literature emphasises a number of shared key factors that translate into a school culture. Factors such as values, beliefs, norms and ways of thinking and working that form the patterns of practice can be relied upon to inform thinking and action (Heckman, 1993; Stolp & Smith, 1994). Halpin and Croft (1963) added another consideration, as they found that teachers perceived culture directly in relation to how well a principal built relationships and modelled work ethics. It is the expectations that fall out of these being in place that form the "assumptions (which) are tacit, unconsciously taken for granted, rarely considered or talked about, and accepted as true and nonnegotiable" (Tagiuri, 1968, p. 185). When assumptions are that a strong work ethic and collaborative practice are the norm, then certain schemata are formed which can promote learning and acceptance of the need for change.

Cognitive science tells us that assumptions and expectations related to the concept of schemata are deemed to be mental models that assist in the organising and understanding of events (Ausubel, 1967; Le Noir, 1993; Slavin, 1990). These connect to the concept of first-order, second-order and third-order change thinking (Bartunek & Moch, 1987) where schemata evolve from superficial changes in understandings, to modifications in shared schemata, and finally to an advanced level where participant capacity has grown so that the shared mental models become evolutionary in nature and attuned to context and process needs (Bartunek & Moch, 1987; Schein, 1996; Senge, 1990).

According to Schein (1996), second-order change that produces shared schemata (mental models) is essential if organisational culture is to change, but this can only be brought about by quality communication between all stakeholders as organisational learning failure is caused, not by resistance to change, human nature, or poor leadership, but by misconceptions and lack of information. Structural and management changes (first-order changes) are the easiest to achieve, while changes in pedagogical practices require active commitment by teachers (second-order change), and are much harder to achieve.

Fullan (1991) makes the point that second-order change is change at the grass roots level and requires restructuring of all stakeholders' roles, including those of parents and students. In *Leading in a culture of change,* Fullan (2001b) identifies five mind and action sets required if cultural change is to occur: defined moral purpose; recognition of what the change process entails; social capacity built across schools and districts; creating and sharing knowledge; and the ability to work collectively to bring multiple initiatives into harmony. These mindsets enable deep levels of reflection to take place. By reflecting deeply on current pedagogy, and developing a mindset which critiques practice in an on-going manner, it is possible to establish a double-loop learning cycle whereby educators are inspired and challenged by fundamental beliefs and accepted ways of working that are no longer adequate, or accurate (Argyris & Schön, 1974). In so doing teachers and leaders are able to change mindsets and move beyond established practices in order to achieve school improvement.

## 2.3.3 Cultural change for school improvement

Changing established mindsets may require changes in culture because factors affecting change implementation "form a system of variables that interact to determine success or failure" (Fullan, 1991a, p. 67). Many times innovations are not put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works or metaphorical images that limit persons to familiar ways of thinking and acting (Morgan, 1980; Senge, 1990; Senge & Lannon-Kim, 1991). These images lie at the heart of the assumptions underpinning the organisation's culture.
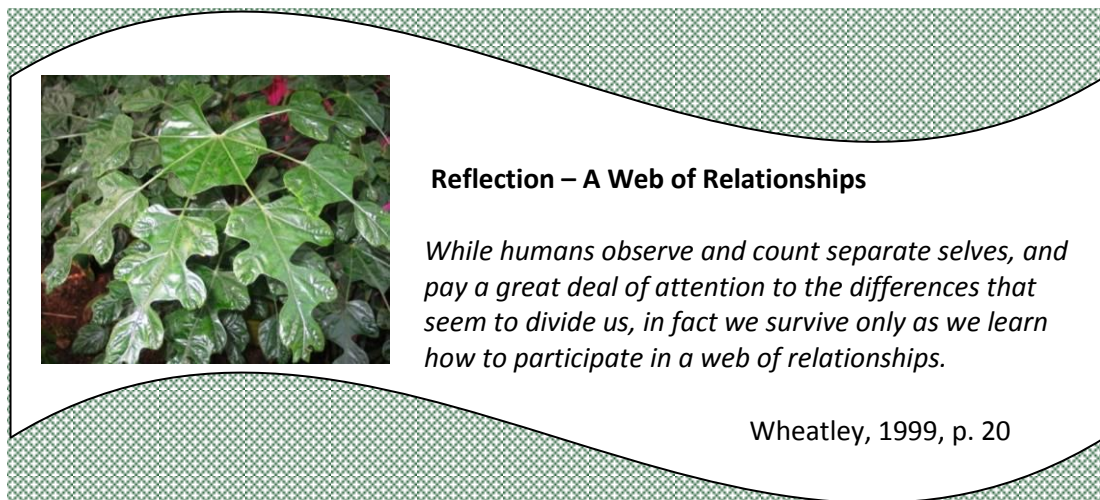
There is strong research support for the correlation between enhancing school culture and improving school outcomes (Aspin, Caldwell, & Harris, 2008; Chapman & Klenowski, 2001; Hargreaves, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Mulford, 2007a; Newmann & Wehlage, 1996; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979). Rutter et al. (1979) were able to conclude, from a study within 12 inner-city London schools, that "…the differences between schools in outcomes were systematically related to their characteristics as social institutions" (p. 201). These characteristics related to the behaviour of teachers, the emphasis placed on academic performance, the acknowledgement and celebration of success and the extent to which students were given responsibility. Rutter et al. (1979) call this ethos. The Oxford Dictionary (1996) explains ethos as the characteristic spirit of a culture, era, or community as manifested in its attitudes and aspirations and it comes from the Greek *ēthos,* meaning nature or disposition. Thus ethos influences organisational culture and can be seen as a critical factor in student behaviour and achievement.

Cultures that support adaptability are responsive to change from the bottom up and have open dynamic systems of practice that evolve in parallel with their changing context (Aspin et al., 2001). Clearly articulated and well understood procedures by which participants can engage in collaborative problem solving, result in a preparedness by staff to also reach out to external sources for assistance, thereby expanding the capacity of the group as a whole and creating networks of support (Andrews & Lewis, 2005; Crowther & Andrews, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, 2007). An openness to critical analysis and the close examination of practice aimed at improving student outcomes, combined with the initiative to seek out professional

development that targets need, shows maturity and flexibility within a learning community (Owens, 2004). Such attributes are a witness to the fact that a new culture has been built.

Winning minds, changing habits and touching hearts through united values and beliefs form the basis for open systems creation. "Open systems …engage with their environments and continue to grow and evolve. I have observed that the search for organizational equilibrium is a sure path to institutional death, a road to zero trafficked by fearful people" (Wheatley, 1992, pp. 76-77). A basic component of open-network schools is the type of adaptive leadership structure present within each school. This structure is one of metastrategic (Limerick et al., 1998) and distributed leadership (Fullan et al., 2004; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Crowther et al. (2009) take this is a step further saying that a parallel leadership structure strengthened by empowered teacher leaders, in partnership with their metastrategic principals, create the type of culture where school improvement can flourish.

## 2.4 Capacity Building



**Reflection – A Web of Relationships**

*While humans observe and count separate selves, and pay a great deal of attention to the differences that seem to divide us, in fact we survive only as we learn how to participate in a web of relationships.*

Wheatley, 1999, p. 20

Building the capacities of an organisation to both learn and continue to learn has for many years been one of the most fundamental aims of successful businesses worldwide (Schein, 1990; Senge, 1992). CEOs from companies such as Shell, Apple, Harley-Davidson, and Ford focussed on building a learning organisation and became leaders of systems focussed on the creation of new knowledge as a key strategy for success and product competitiveness (Senge, 2006). But, what is it that makes the

dream of a learning organisation a reality? Senge (2006) would see the change that must take place as being *metanoia* or a "shift in mind" (p. 13).

This shift in mind is one that gives the organisation the ability to adapt and change as the need arises. "Most organisations engage in what is called single-loop learning. When errors are detected, the correction process relies on past routines and present policies. In contrast, learning organisations use double-loop learning strategies" as a means of re-conceptualising practice (Robbins et al., 2004, p. 583). Double-loop learning challenges deeply rooted assumptions and norms within an organisation enabling capacity building to occur (Argyris & Schön, 1978). It is through this process of double-loop learning that practice is changed. "A review of the literature on the impact of schools shows that the differences in the impact of teachers on learning outcomes for students are significantly greater than the impact of the differences between schools" (Cuttance, 2001, p. xiii). The ability of teachers to connect students to the learning process is one that must be built (Marland, 1993).

Growth in school capital, in other words measurable gains in social, intellectual and organisational capability, are created when successful capacity building takes place within the workforce (Fullan, 2000; Hargreaves, 2001; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; LRI, 2011; Mulford, 2007; Silins & Mulford, 2007). Capacity building aimed at improving student outcomes focuses on building the capacity of teachers as learners with their peers, within learning communities focussed on a shared vision, shared values and goals (Gronn, 2000). In the 1990s, research focussing on reform and school innovation (King & Newmann, 2000; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995) highlighted the capital gains made in schools which fostered the development of professional learning communities and which built school capacity through inquiry and collaborative problem solving.

## 2.4.1 School capital

School capital can be seen as "the collective competency of the school as an entity to bring about effective change… leadership needs to focus on two dimensions – the teaching and learning focus on the one hand and capacity on the other" (Hopkins, 2001, p. 12). David Hargreaves (2001, 2003b) explores the notion of capital as having a number of faces which he relates to the concept of leverages, seen as the

ability or capacity of teachers to enhance student learning. Hargreaves (2003b) identifies intellectual capital as what teachers know and can do; social capital as the relationships between stakeholders which are built on trust; and, organisational capital as the knowledge and skills within the school and their combined ability to improve student outcomes (pp. 5-6.)

A six year research project in Australian and international schools identified four kinds of capital; intellectual, social, spiritual and financial which Caldwell (2010) described in the following manner

> Intellectual capital refers to the level of knowledge and skill of those who work in or for the school. Social capital refers to the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies, organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school. Spiritual capital refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning... Financial capital refers to the money available to support the school. (p. 1)

Fullan (2000) focuses on human capital as being the knowledge, dispositions and capabilities of professional staff within a school. He suggests that both the establishment of a learning community and program coherence are essential to the development of human capital.

The Leadership Research International group (2011) blends several views of capital (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Mulford, 2007) with their own research findings to produce the following definitions:

- *Social capital* describes the professional relationships of trust and respect, dynamics within parallel leadership and student well-being.

- *Intellectual capital* describes a combination of the creation of school vision; identification of a school's underpinning values; the conceptualisation and articulation of a schoolwide pedagogy; insights about school improvement processes; and student academic achievement across learning areas.

- *Organisational capital* describes a combination of procedures for shared school planning, linkages internally and to external networks, organisation of time and space, use of technologies, curriculum design, and school aesthetics. (LRI, 2011)

For school capital to be accrued, capacity building must take place (Hopkins, 2001).

## 2.4.2 Capacity building for school improvement

Hadfield (2002) sees capacity building as an expression of the creative operationalisation of change, while Senge (1990) sees it as a self-developing force. Capacity building can develop both individual and collective capacity at the levels of conscious and sub-conscious knowledge related to social, intellectual and emotional responses, and actions (Newmann, King, & Youngs, 2000). Mitchell and Sackney (2000) depict capacity building as the ability to adapt and change within three key domains - individual, collective and organisational. Hopkins and Jackson (n.d.) see the core of capacity building being made up of four components: distributed leadership; social capital; values coherence and moral agency; and, intellectual capital (p. 8). While Crowther et al. (2011) define capacity building as "the intentional process of mobilizing a school's resources in order to enhance priority outcomes – and sustain those improved outcomes" (p. 20). Many believe social and intellectual capacity building lie at the heart of capacity building processes at both the individual and collective level, as both are essential in order to build organisational capacity for improvement as a whole (Andrews & Lewis, 2005; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Newmann, et al., 2001; Senge, 2006).

## 2.4.3 Building social capacity

It has been suggested that building social capacity largely revolves around developing both social and emotional intelligence attributes (Bloom, 1956; Gardner, 1999; Glasser, 1998; Goleman, 2005; Myers & Briggs, 1962; Pohl, 2000). Collective understanding of workplace interactions and organisational characteristics are displayed as a mindful awareness of group dynamics and the knowledge of how to develop necessary support structures according to individual need (Fullan, 2007; Limerick et al.*,* 1998; Morgan, 1980; Senge, 1990). The sharing of pedagogical

explorations and the joint determining of quality practice suited to school context encourage teachers to work collaboratively and to trial innovative knowledge application as a community (Conway, 2008; Lewis, 2003; Stoll & Louis, 2007).

Research shows that basic social interaction between school staff impacts strongly on professional relationships, and where relationships are strong learning communities are able to flourish (Hargreaves, 1992; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Stoll & Louis, 2007). When these social capacities are developed and teachers, both individually and as a group, have a strong grasp of core curriculum components then some would say that the prerequisites for the sustainability of quality educational outcomes are in place (Cuttance, 2001; Glatthorn, 1995). In *Fifteen thousand hours*, Rutter et al. (1979), found that the differences between student outcomes from school to school were specifically related to their social characteristics.

> All of these factors were open to modification by the staff, rather than fixed by external constraints… the implication is that the individual actions or measures may combine to create a particular ethos, or set of values, attitudes and behaviours which will become characteristic of the school as a whole. (p. 178)

Building *individual social capacity* within schools contributes to the building of community capacity. Building social capacity requires individuals to develop social intelligence, both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, in combination with emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2005, 2006).

Social intelligence was originally a concept taken from Thorndike's (1920) division of intelligence into abstract, mechanical and social, but has taken on many meanings since then (Campbell & McCord, 1996; Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987; Goleman, 2006). In some ways, social intelligence can be seen as a mindful awareness of self and others (Palmer, 2007). Mindfulness can be seen as "a type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Mayer & Salovey, 1993, p. 433). Along the same lines, Caruso and Salovey (2004) speak of emotional intelligence as having four basic attributes: identifying emotions in others; using emotions to focus thinking; understanding the causes of emotions and to

"include and manage emotions in your decision making to make optimal choices in life" (p. 26). Social and emotional intelligence appear integrally entwined.

Goleman (2005, 2006) suggests that emotional and social intelligence are related concepts but sees emotional intelligence as a one person psychology and social intelligence as interactive psychology. Self-knowledge is an essential attribute for the quality teacher to possess as "the capacity to know oneself and to know others is an inalienable part of the human condition" (Gardner, 1983, p. 243). In schools, teachers and leaders with the ability to know their strengths and challenges, and be mindfully aware of the needs of others, work well to build capacity within the group to entertain new ideas in a critically reflective manner (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Palmer, 2007).

Ratey (2001) explains that "emotions are essential to our identity as human beings… and emotions are essential to the trait that makes us most human, the ability to reason" (p. 250). Schools can become powerful learning communities when the ability to reason is a collective one. Such ability is strengthened by social and intellectual capacity enabling the development of shared responsibility to tackle difficult issues within a trusting environment (Andrews & Lewis, 2005; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Fullan, 1997).

Building *collective social capacity* involves individuals working together on shared purpose and taking responsibility for self and others' learning and welfare. Successful administrators understand that interpersonal skills are needed to create the relationships which will allow them to lead effectively (Donaldson, 2001; Lovely, 2004). The building of social capacity relies on the creation of a trusting environment. It is when trust is well established that risk-taking, creativity and self-fulfilment can occur (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Hargreaves, 2001; Leadbeater, 2000; Louis, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2001). Referring to the attribute of trust, Fullan (1997) says "the best way to deal with change is to improve relationships" (p. 13). A trusting school environment benefits all stakeholders

> A safe environment for the learner (and the teacher) is an environment
> where error is welcomed and fostered – because we learn so much from
> errors and from the feedback that then accrues from going in the wrong

direction or not going sufficiently fluently in the right direction. In the same way, teachers themselves need to be in a safe environment to learn about the success or otherwise of their teaching from others. (Hattie, 2009, p. 23)

The IDEAS understanding of social capacity building is that of a school community working together to build a culture where individual creativity and diversity are celebrated within a collectively agreed vision and values framework (Andrews & Lewis, 2005). Trust is actively built through a no blame policy and frameworks such as that of 'Skilful Discussion' provide a vehicle for dialogue (Isaacs, 1993; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith & Kleiner, 1994). These protocols for engagement allow for on-going shared, open meaning making and decision implementation to occur (Andrews & Lewis, 2005; Falk, 1997; Little & Horn, 2007). Unless teams can learn, the organisation cannot learn and "today the principles and practices of dialogue are being rediscovered and put into a contemporary context" (Gardner, 2000, p. 19).

The 2004 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Report affirmed that a general sense of belonging at school is so important for students' life chances and successes that it should be given equal indicator status with academic results. The report demonstrated a significant relationship between social capital and student outcomes, not just academic ones, but in the intangibles of trust and the ability to collaborate with others. Beare (2001) agreed, for he saw "developing beliefs, forming values and fostering constructive attitudes permeates the entire fabric of educating and learning; and is at the heart of any worthy school" (pp. 19-20).

Teachers, as they work in groups or collaborative partnerships within their schools, create the beginnings of social capacity through building relationships with each other and their communities (Falk & Kilpatrick, 1999). However, collegiality does not happen overnight, it cannot be contrived – if it is, then it is more likely to diminish rather than strengthen school social capacity (Hargreaves, 1991; Mulford 2006). To move forward with social capacity building in schools requires knowledge of the school and its community, concerns, needs and beliefs (Hargreaves, 2001; Kilpatrick, Johns, Mulford, Falk, & Prescott, 2001; Mulford, 2007a). Building social capacity requires leadership commitment to the creation of opportunities for staff and

community to meet and share ideas. Schools and their leaders "must learn how to lose time in order to gain time" (Mulford, 2007b, p. 176). As relationships within schools improve then collective intellectual capacity can be built (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2002; Newmann & Associates, 1996).

## 2.4.4 Building intellectual capacity

Professional growth is the key to building intellectual capacity in schools and there is evidence to show that when teachers work in partnership with others, professional growth is maximised (Newmann et al., 2000). Cuttance (2001) reported that,

> The most powerful innovations incorporated teams of teachers learning by 'working' with new knowledge …enhancing their understanding of the learning needs and capacities of their students...Professional learning requires active engagement and work on the knowledge being developed by teachers. (p. xxvii)

Scribner, Hager and Warne (2002) found that professional autonomy and attention to individual need are necessary and salient conditions of strong professional communities, agreeing with Senge (1990) that "organizations learn only through individuals who learn" (p. 139).

The building of *individual intellectual capacity* requires teachers to take responsibility for their own learning, which also means that teachers must have influence in the decision making process, and become explicitly aware of their own pedagogical practices (Anderson, 1995; Glatthorn, 1995). Teachers need to develop multiple understandings in multiple ways (Gardner, 2000) and be able to reflect on their learning and the knowledge of others in order for double-loop learning to occur (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Reflection is of major importance in the development of intellectual capacity both at an individual level and within the collective domain. "Reflective practitioners can stand at a distance from a difficult environment and see it for what it is – and isn't. They are less likely to be overwhelmed or overcome by it, and more able to improve their school" (Barth, 2001a, p. 69).

Developing *collective intellectual capacity* was once considered possible by training the 'expert teacher' who could then take it back to the whole, but "although

individual teachers might profit from such experiences, in general such programs fail to enhance expertise or school professional community" (Newmann, 1996, p. 198). Instead, it is through sharing pedagogy and best practice, striving for understanding and collective meaning based on student needs and learning goals, and endeavouring to bring to light the assumptions and norms which underlie action or 'the way we do things around here' (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) that creates collective intellectual capacity (Andrews & Crowther, 2003; Andrews & Lewis, 2004; Hadfield, 2003a; King & Newmann, 2000; Kruse, Louis & Bryk, 1994).

As individuals within schools take responsibility for the learning of others as well as their own, collective capacity grows in a synergistic relationship between knowledge and need (National College School Leadership (NCSL), 2006). This aligns with how Jeyaraj (2011) speaks of organisational cognisance where "changes in cognitive processes...emerge in the professional learning community during a process of school improvement" (p. 175). Through the collective lived experience of meaning making that occurs as a result of this synergy, an 'orgmindfulness' develops and provides living proof that school capacity has been created (Conway, 2008). Such an understanding of collective cognisance and the building of school capacity supports the view that a school learning community is one capable of changing its behaviour in response to learnings or 'new knowledge' as it comes to hand (Lewis, 2003).

> Changes in behaviour are outward manifestations of cognitive change. New behaviour will not be evidenced in the long term unless an intellectual decision has been reached …that such a change is deemed more effective in the attainment of a desired outcome (Robbins et al., 2004, p. 583).

A report written for NCSL suggested four approaches to reducing variation in teaching practice thereby increasing *school intellectual capacity* (Connor, 2005). These were to: collectively collect, analyse, interpret and use data; share teacher and learning strategies; develop curriculum around student interests; and foster leadership development. None of which can eventuate without communication conduits being in place. Little and Horn (2007) speak of how, through discussion, certain dynamics come into play within learning communities. These allow teachers to (a) normalise problems, by finding the 'what' and 'why' of an event; and (b) move understandings

from the specifics of a problem to the generalities and the principles underpinning the experience.

> The linking that happens in … conversation helps the group collectively construct a class of instances and narrated responses that are clustered around defining and explaining a common teaching problem and set of principles for responding to. (p. 88)

Such deep levels of intellectual interaction are necessary to the development of collective understandings of quality pedagogical practices and in IDEAS schools are the forerunner of developing a framework of schoolwide pedagogical principles (Andrews & Associates, 2011). This framework, also identified as SWP, is the guide and mirror by which teachers make decisions regarding best teaching practices in their context. It anchors thinking while at the same time allowing innovation to occur (Crowther & Associates, 2011). The theories and pedagogies that have underpinned the development of a school's SWP guide collective pedagogical practices and through application in the classroom context acknowledges teachers as intellectuals (Crowther et al., 2009). In Leach and Moon's (2008) words

> Theory enables our deepest intentions about the learning process to be made explicit… A tentative relationship between theory and practice must always therefore be allowed. Theoretical frameworks never tell us exactly what to do. There is always an interpretative (hermeneutic) dimension that disallows any facile relationship between theory and practice. The role of the scholar teacher is to view practice through the lens of the theoretical framework and the theoretical framework through the lens of practice. In this process each is intensified. (p. 21)

A 'scholar teacher' copes with challenge and uncertainty but also requires the collective ability of the group to be innovative and take risks when needed, and to think creatively and not necessarily rationally (Farago & Skyrme, 1995). For Senge (1990), real learning is at the heart of being human and humans have the power to re-create themselves both as individuals and as a group. "For a learning organization it is not enough to survive… 'Survival learning' or what is more often termed 'adaptive

learning' is important – indeed it is necessary. But for a learning organization, 'adaptive learning' must be joined by 'generative learning', learning that enhances our capacity to create" (p.14).

Developing collective intellectual capacity that continually moves thinking into the higher order thinking levels of synthesis and creativity lays the foundations for whole school improvement to take place (Bloom, 1956). Effective communication frameworks, grounded in a common cultural context, provide educators with a learning language by which knowledge and understandings can be shared. "The construction of meaningful, practical knowledge through the development of a shared language" (Conway, 2008, p. 223) leads to knowledge emergence and uptake, which in turn can be shared (Lewis, 2003; Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). This synergistic learning and knowledge creation spiral lies at the heart of 'knowledge creation' (Lewis, 2003; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In a learning organisation "adaptive learning" must be joined by "generative learning... learning that enhances our capacity to create" (Senge, 1990, p. 14).

"Creativity is rarely, if at all, a matter of the individual creator creating in splendid or miserable isolation. Rather… it is a matter of people working in intended or unintended collaboration" (Pope, 2005, p. 65). Seltzer and Bentley (1999) see that there are four key qualities to genuine creativity which are: the ability to identify new problems, rather than depending on others to define them; the ability to transfer knowledge gained in one context to another in order to solve a problem; a belief in learning as an incremental process, in which repeated attempts will eventually lead to success; and the capacity to focus attention in the pursuit of a goal or set of goals" (pp.10-11). The aim of creative thinking is to stimulate curiosity and promote divergence (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Johnson & Lamb, 2007; McWilliam, 2008). Freire (1992) states that from within a "postmodern progressive mindset…teaching is a creative act, a critical act, and not a mechanical one" (pp. 67-68).

Creative intellectual capacity resides in the establishment of "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together" (Senge,

1990, p. 3). There is now acknowledgement that professional teachers must be creative conceptual thinkers in order to embrace the change challenge in this new age (Conway, 2008).

For a whole school community to be capable of creative thinking in the macro (big picture) and micro (problem solving) sense, then key skills must be developed to facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge, particularly implicit knowledge – the assumptions and beliefs that are traditionally below the surface (Farago & Skyrme, 1995; Kelly, 2004; Paul, 1987; Senge, 1990). These key skills are: taking a holistic perspective (seeing the team and organisation as a whole); modelling for and supporting colleagues; listening and observing; and, communicating across organisational boundaries (Farago & Skyrme, 1995).

## 2.4.5 Building school capacity as a whole

Social capacity, intellectual capacity, distributed leadership capacity, and collective commitment to improving student outcomes, build organisational capacity within schools to reach shared goals (Hopkins & Jackson, n. d.). Newmann and Wehlage (1995) stated, "if schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional learning community that is characterised by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff" (p. 37). To create the capacity to act, leadership must create the space, contexts, opportunities and time to reflect, grow and act, and that growth in leadership comes through empowerment bestowed by others and within, as the led give permission for action to happen (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003). It is energy and not just time that is the key to sustainability – energy to put new knowledge into practice and for practice to turn into new knowledge (Frost, 2006; Fullan et al., 2006).

From their Wisconsin research, Newmann, King and Youngs (2000) identified the interaction of five main components as being key to capacity building in schools: developing teacher individual knowledge, skills and dispositions; providing adequate technical resources such as instructional materials, assessment systems, and equipment; establishing a sense of professional community among the staff; ensuring

that instructional program coherence is in place; and ongoing development of principal leadership. The establishment of these comes down to the individual and group level of commitment to improvement.

The ability to transform espoused values, beliefs and pedagogical principles into practice is both an individual and a collective responsibility. At an individual teacher level practice refers to the explicit and tacit dimensions of teacher work (van Manen, 1999). For schoolwide capacity building to take place, we must as a profession, "go beyond plateaus…to investigate, learn, experiment, and develop better solutions. Systems thinkers in action actually create the intellectual (ideas) and moral (purpose and social commitment) conditions that increase motivation without sapping energy" (Fullan, 2004, p. 13).

Through their research, Andrews and Lewis (2007) speak of how shared meaning "provides the foundation for culture building and the creation of an image of a preferred future. It is the shared purpose and focussed pedagogical approach that results in improved outcomes for students" (p. 134). Schools focussed on capacity building constantly provide opportunities for individual and collective reflection, as it is only through quality conversations that there is any possibility of setting parameters regarding what quality pedagogy entails (Barth, 2001b; Fetherstone, 2006; King & Kitchener, 1994; Posner, 1996).

The OECD International School Improvement Project reported that school improvement rested on the desire to act which is emergent from a combination of internal school factors; the culture of the school, quality and variety of teaching and learning activities (pedagogy in action), organisational norms, professional learning frameworks, knowledge-transfer processes, leadership arrangements and receptiveness to external learning (Hopkins & Stern, 1996). A school community's ability to effectively enact improvement strategies largely depends on communication efficacy; the interpersonal connections within the communities we inhabit (Moolenaar, Daly, & Sleegars, 2011).

Effective capacity building occurs as a conscious effort is made to create, transmit and acquire understandings that can be used to improve school outcomes (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003). Whole school capacity building is a complex interrelationship of

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many dynamics. It encompasses elements such as leadership, physical and human resourcing, social connectedness, intellectual qualities and more. Crowther et al. (2011) capture the complexity of the capacity building process within the COSMIC Capacity Building Model (Figure 2.4).

## 2.4.6 The COSMIC Capacity Building Model

The *Research-Based Framework for Enhancing School Outcomes* (RBF) was developed by the IDEAS team to assist school leaders with the complex task of aligning practices schoolwide (Crowther et al., 2011, p. 176). Findings from the University of Wisconsin's longitudinal studies into school improvement were particularly helpful in its formation (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; King & Newmann, 2000). By diagnosing where strengths and challenges lie, the *Research-Based Framework* enables leadership teams, with their staff, to focus on need and therefore build capacity in those areas thereby increasing school capacity as a whole.

Four key theoretical concepts have been identified as useful tools for the building of school capacity: metastrategy (Limerick et al., 1998); appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney 1996); action learning (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Kolb, 1984; Zuber-Skerrit, 1990) and organisational capacity building (Newmann et al., 2000) which when linked build leadership capacity, intellectual capacity and overall organisational capacity to achieve shared goals (Andrews & Crowther, 2002). Schools with shared goals create "a shared commitment to their restructuring effort, even when members of the staff disagreed" (Conway, 2008, p. 195), enabling ways in which people may equitably share in a common life (Guttman & Thompson, 1996).

The COSMIC capacity building model (Figure 2.4) emerged from recent research conducted by the Leadership Research International (LRI) group (Crowther & Associates, 2011). It highlights how the dynamics of a school community which is empowered and strengthened by parallel leadership builds school capacity leading to improved school outcomes.

Each of the dynamics, the hexagonal shapes within Figure 2.4, indicate the building of school capacity to engage with and undertake further growth. Within the second

dynamic, at the diagnostic level, capacity building is triggered by the IDEAS protocols, establishing a 'no blame' environment where significant social capacity is built and then continues to expand.
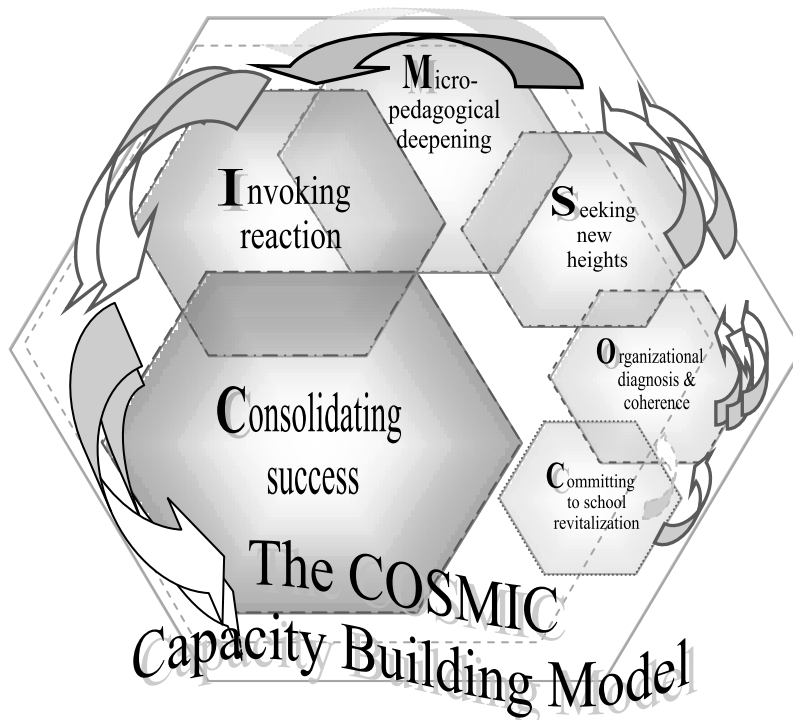


Figure 2.3 The COSMIC capacity building model. Taken from F. Crowther et al., 2011, p. 16

As unique community characteristics and challenges are identified, cognitive engagement with collectively identified findings stimulates a growth in intellectual capacity as challenges are shared and addressed and the need for change is accepted. Over a two or three year period it is to this phase that schools return, and each new diagnosis leads to engagement with the successive phases in an ongoing cycle of school improvement. It is here that organisational capacity is built and expands throughout the cycle and it is within this recurring engagement point that sustainability of school improvement becomes possible.

The most significant phase within the COSMIC Capacity Building Model is that of micro-pedagogical deepening. It is within this phase that the significant intellectual capacity built is translated into changes in collective teaching practice. The positioning of this phase at the highest point within the model is indicative of it being the watershed moment for schools and once this has been fully engaged with on-going school improvement becomes probable and sustainable (Crowther et al., 2011).

Hargreaves and Fink (2003) warn that "sustaining change in education has to do with more than maintaining improvements over time" (p. 693). It is through "capturing a heightened consciousness of the creation of significant new meaning" (Conway, 2008, p. 238) through language and visual imagery that collective intelligence is strengthened to the point where sustainability and thrive ability is possible. Through on-going commitment to quality communication in a trusting environment, effective communities of learners grow and became strengthened over time (Andrews & Lewis, 2002, 2005; Stoll, Robertson, Butler-Kisber, Sklar, & Whittingham, 2007; Stoll & Seashore Louise, 2007).

## 2.5 Communities of Learners



**Reflection –A Community of learners**

*A community of professional learners occurs when professionals "come together frequently and regularly to reflect on their practice, to assess their effectiveness, to collectively study in a social context what they consider to be areas in need of attention, and to make decisions about that they need to learn to become more effective".*

(Hord & Cowan, 1999, n.p.)

A learning organisation has the capacity to create, expand, and nurture expansive thinking patterns; such communities of learners are "continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Emphasis within a learning community is placed on collaborative learning and the impact such learning has on practice (Huffman et al., 2001; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). A mindset that sees learning and pedagogy as an evolving, growing, ever-changing phenomenon underpins the learning organisation (Morgan, 1997b).

Bryk and Schneider (2003) talk about "an interrelated set of mutual dependencies embedded within the social exchanges in any school community" (p. 41) which form

the basis for building trusting relationships as the foundation on which to build a learning community. Professional learning communities "play a key role in building individuals' and schools' capacities for continuous and sustainable learning in a rapidly changing world" (Stoll et al., 2007, p. 63).

When learning is seen as "any relatively permanent change in behaviour that occurs as a result of experience…we can say that changes in behaviour indicate that learning has taken place and that learning is a change to behaviour" (Robbins et al., 2004, p. 46). Collective changes in pedagogical practices in schools come from communities of learners combining strengths focussed on improving student outcomes (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). These learning communities can be viewed as the basis for essential school reform, acknowledging the necessity of creating a culture of care and strong relationships where learning occurs in a trusting, blame free environment (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 2007; Levy & Levy, 1993; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1992; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). Sergiovanni (1994) believes that to build a learning community that speaks as 'we' rather than as a group of 'I's' requires schools to reorganise values, beliefs and practice to reflect shared community ones.

Communities made up of educators with common interests or purposes can be categorised in many ways depending on their purpose: a professional community of learners (Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, & Fernandez, 1993) communities of practice (Trenton, 2002; Wenger, 1998), learning networks (Weil & Fulton, 2001), professional learning communities or PLCs (Du Four, 2003; Stoll & Louis, 1997), communities of professional learners (Hord, 2003), action learning communities (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) and the like. Many of these communities are related to each other by their purpose, membership, means of communication, goals and priorities.

However, the focus of the current research project was on communities of learners with attributes such as Hargreaves (2007) describes:

> Sustainable professional learning communities…put learning first – before achievement and testing – and get better achievement as a consequence...they do not depend on the parental authority figure of the

school principal but plan for the succession of principals and change champions, creating a strong, resilient and distributed teacher culture that will smooth the path of succession events. (p. 192)

For 21st century schools to become communities of learners where teacher-learners and student-learners become innovative, reflective thinkers capable of 'dancing on the shifting carpet' (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010), teachers need processes and a language for learning "which allow generative (double-loop) learning rather than adaptive (single-loop) learning. This requires a fundamentally different way of working – with teachers becoming collaborative creators and implementers of contextualised professional knowledge" (Lewis, 2003, p. 264). Over the last 10 to 20 years, research that focuses on what effective learning communities look like shows that they are centred around specific contexts and workplaces, unlike communities of practice which tend to be established across contexts (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, Bennett, & Rolheiser-Bennett, 1990; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Senge, 1990).

## 2.5.1 Learning communities

Hord (1997, p. 1) described the benefits of learning communities as being multifaceted in nature encompassing collegial support and stronger professional connections, as well as increased levels of teacher job satisfaction and commitment. These benefits are due largely to the fact that the individuals within a professional learning community share norms and values, utilise reflective dialogue and are prepared to share practice and work collaboratively for the good of the collective (Bolam et al., 2005; Kruse et al., 1994; Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996). The positive collective mindset that exists within a professional learning community allows for change efforts to be accepted and implemented while also permitting the airing of feelings of concern and reluctance to change (Conway, 2008). When radical change is at the heart of the school improvement process, it is critical to understand the point of view of those involved in the change effort for "a central and major premise…is that the single most important factor in any change process is the people who will be most affected by the change" (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, & Hall, 1987, p. 29).

Trust and collaboration are the foundations of a professional learning community, as these attributes enable expertise and learning experiences to be shared at a deep level of understanding which in turn facilitates transformation (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2002; Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell, 1991). Transforming schools into professional learning communities requires the structuring of schools in a way that allows for mutual collaboration, emotional support, and personal growth (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Professional interactions are centred on detailed examination of student achievement and given direction by deep collective reflection (Fetherstone, 2007; Mulford, Silins, & Leithwood, 2003).

A professional learning community that is capable of really making a difference "has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning" (Bolam et al., 2005, p. iii). Although there is no one universal definition of a professional learning community, a research report for NCSL, comprehensively describe a professional learning community as being a community of learners with the following attributes: shared vision and values; collective responsibility for student learning; mutual trust, respect and support; collaboration focussed on student learning; individual and collective professional learning; openness and networking within a continuous process of reflection (Bolam et al., 2005). The term 'professional learning community' suggests that focus is not just on individual teachers' learning but on professional learning, within the context of a cohesive group, that focuses on collective knowledge, and that exists "within an ethic of interpersonal caring that permeates the life of teachers, students and school leaders" (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007, p. 3).

## 2.5.2 The actions of learning communities

The focus in a learning community is to enact changes in order to improve conditions and outcomes for the whole school community, thus reflecting in and on action becomes a priority (Hord, 1997). Schön (1987) speaks of 'action' learning communities possessing the following characteristics: bias for reflection-in-action; formation of learning alliances; development of external networks; multiple reward systems; creation of meaningful information; individual empowerment; and leadership and vision. While all people have the capacity to learn, the structures in

which they have to function are often not conducive to reflection and engagement. Furthermore, people may lack the tools and guiding ideas to make sense of the situations they face (Argyris, 1993).

Senge (1990) sees that some of the benefits of a learning organisation are that skills are shared, support is mutual and there is an emphasis on collective achievement.

> When you ask people about what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience. People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative. (p. 13)

According to Senge (1990), the dimensions that distinguish learning organisations from more traditional organisations are the following: systems thinking; personal mastery; mental models; building shared vision; and, team learning. All these work together to create "a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future" (p. 69). An effective and sustainable learning community is one that looks towards the future (Crowther & Andrews, 2003).

Originally the thinking behind the creation of learning communities was focussed solely on improving teaching and learning outcomes for students and teacher morale was not a consideration (Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). However, the necessity of creating a culture of care and strong relationships is now included in the parameters of what a professional learning community encompasses (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Hargreaves with Giles, 2003; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007).

Structures that need to be in place for school based learning communities to thrive are physical connectivity (rather than solely connectivity via technology), dedicated meeting time set aside on a regular basis, effective means of communication, and teacher empowerment through shared decision making with a measure of interdependency between community members (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Little, 1982).

Sergiovanni (1994) believes that to build a learning community that speaks as 'we' rather than as a group of 'I's' requires schools to reorganise values, beliefs and practice to reflect shared community ones and it is only then the word 'community' will live rather than remain as a word on a mission statement. Pedagogical practice in schools must change to meet the needs of our students today but "when teachers are isolated from one another, few will be willing to take the risks and endure the failures that professional transformation requires" (Palmer, 2007, p. xxiii). However, when teachers are brought together as a community of learners, are allowed to participate in decision making and share responsibilities of leadership for learning and pedagogical change, then students are the ultimate beneficiaries (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996).

DuFour (2004) captures the essence of a professional learning community's commitment to learning when he says

> the professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift – from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning – has profound implications for schools (p. 6).

It is this refocussing that lies at the heart of teachers learning together to create more effective learning opportunities for students, but teachers will find this difficult to achieve without supportive leadership being in place (Lambert, 1998).

Lambert (1998), Fullan (1999), Silins and Mulford (2001), and Crowther (2003) all agree that leadership that promotes shared learning creates new and shared understandings which augment the skills and knowledge of the whole and allow schools to anticipate and adapt to change while improving student achievement. According to Lambert (1998) this has a reciprocal effect, for collaborative learning is the core activity that expands leadership capacity. Distributed leadership aimed at the building of learning communities is increasingly touted as the direction to take and there is a wealth of evidence to support this suggestion (Louis, 2007; Newmann &

Associates, 1996; Sergiovanni, 2001). However, for a learning community to truly thrive there must be clearly established avenues of open, inclusive communication in a trusting environment (Gronn, 2000; Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008; Little & Horn, 2007).

## 2.5.3 Communication within the learning community

Quality communication can be seen to be essential to the development of a professional learning community where collaboration lies at the heart of learning. Teacher effectiveness increases in a community where staff members take "collective responsibility for achieving a shared educational purpose for the school as a whole and collaborate with one another to attain it" (Newmann et al., 2000, p. 180). However, to operate in this manner requires members of the community to have a shared understanding, or common ground, for making meaning. There must be a cultural knowledge and awareness that underpins this meeting place of minds (Austin, 2005; Krauss & Morsella, 2000), "absent this knowledge, (and) many utterances will be incomprehensible, or perhaps worse, will be interpreted incorrectly" (Krauss & Morsella, 2000, p. 7).

Within any community, interpretation creates a reflection of knowledge (Bandura, 1986; Berger & Luckmann, 1996). The dichotomous nature of this interpreted knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) lends itself to a complexity of understandings, as knowledge can be internal or external, and tacit or explicit (Brookfield, 1995; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The more clearly the factors that contribute to the knowledge creation process are understood the more likely it is that collective meaning making will occur (Andrews & Lewis, 2002). Communication protocols assist in the facilitation of open inclusive communication and simple rules can be applied in group discussions to ensure that all members can participate and opinions will be respected allowing group meaning making to take place (Isaacs & Smith, 1994).

## 2.6 Making Meaning



**Reflection – Language and Identity**

*Language is the only way by which we can bring pedagogic experience into a symbolic form that creates by its very discursive nature a conversational relation. Writing and reading are the ways in which we sustain a conversational relation: a discourse about our pedagogic lives…"*

(van Manen, 1990, p. 111)

The making of meaning can prove to be problematic and divisive, largely due to the fact that "comprehending the true intention of an utterance may require knowledge far beyond what one possesses, and this may be particularly prevalent when the cultural situations of the parties involved are markedly different" (Krauss & Morsella, n.d., p. 8). Therefore shared meaning making through dialogue is necessary as it provides the foundation for culture building and creating an image of a preferred future (Andrews & Lewis, 2007). An effective shared meaning system is the conduit allowing knowledge creation to occur. When speaking of the power of collective dialogue Bohm (1996) conjures up a vivid image of "a stream of meaning flowing among and through us…a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new understanding…And this shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together" (p. 6).

### 2.6.1 Knowledge creation

In the past knowledge was conceived as something possessed by individuals not organisations, however, this has changed and now cognition is recognised as being part of a social cultural process (Levy, 1997; Owens, 2004; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005). Teachers are daily faced with the need to collectively integrate knowledge and create new understandings as to what their roles and

responsibilities are as "the new stokers of society" (Levy, 1997, p. 36). Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) 'Knowledge Creation Spiral' explores the interrelationship of tacit and explicit knowledge as it emerges in group activity through a process of socialisation, externalisation, networking and internalisation.

An understanding of the nature of knowledge has changed over time to the consideration of knowledge as a practice-based social construct (Bandura, 2002). The term 'situated cognition', grounded in historical, cultural and social-relational contexts (Damon, 1991), has been used to denote practice-centred knowledge. Practice-based knowledge "…involves adapting knowledge and thinking skills to solve unique problems…and is based upon the concept that knowledge is contextually situated and is fundamentally influenced by the activity, context, and culture in which it is used" (McLellan, 1996, p. 9)

A significant component of knowledge creation revolves around the concept of collective intelligence (Conway, 2008; Hargreaves, 2003a) which has a variety of interpretations, all of which are conceptually related to the creation of knowledge. "Collective intelligence is the dynamic formation of an organic state of capacity building when a discerning community acts creatively in concert and acumen toward a common goal" (Conway, 2008, p. 238). The work of Levy (1997), Leadbeater (2000), Katzenmyer and Moller, (2001), and Conway (2008) have explored the significance of creative collective intelligence within learning communities, as have others. Hargreaves (2003a) refers to schools as learning societies which can apply a wealth of prior knowledge and experience that produces a 'collective intelligence' which allows a school "community…to apply its organised cognitive resources to the solution of shared problems" (p. 5). Stoll et al. (2006) suggest there is a broad international consensus that "a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way, and operating as a collective enterprise" describes how professional learning communities create collective intelligence. Jeyaraj's (2011) recent research points to the creation of organisational cognisance as an outcome of a process of school improvement dependent "on the strategic and structural support

afforded by the school leader(s), enabling members of the professional learning community to engage in ideational sharing, strategic sense-making, co-learning and reflection" (p. 238).

In the same vein, Levy (1997) and Liang (2001) described the sharing of knowledge within 'intelligent communities' in much the same way as Leadbeater (2000, p. 29) with his classic statement "we do not need more information: we need more understanding" while Lewis (2003) reflects that it is crucial for the collective to recognize that "tacit knowledge has both cognitive and practical dimensions and the sharing of tacit knowledge plays a vital role in the knowledge creation process" (p. 53). It is with such sharing that the gap between practical knowledge and knowledge gained outside the classroom diminishes and the possibility of blending authoritative understandings, contextually specific school-wide understandings and personal beliefs and principles becomes possible (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Craig, 1995; Huberman, 1983).

Andrews and Crowther (2003) describe this blending of knowledge and understanding as '3-dimensional pedagogy' built as teachers reflect, act, reflect and create new knowledge from both individual and collaborative elaborations on what 'best practice' entails. To do this the 3-D professional brings together personal principles, authoritative knowledge and schoolwide principles of best practice into an integrated whole approach to teaching and learning (Andrews & Crowther, 2003).To enhance the sharing of principles and mental models of best practice, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) believe figurative language adds heightened meaning which can help group members to explore and articulate tacit knowledge and thus create new knowledge which in turn can be shared.

## 2.6.2 Explicating and integrating knowledge

The articulation of knowledge through language is what brings clarity of meaning. Learning occurs when the 'taken for granted' is brought to a conscious level (Hadfield, 2003; Robbins et al., 2004) for there are "deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (Senge, 1990, p. 8). Reframing understanding (or [re] presenting them) is more likely to occur through 'dialogic exchange' as "without the

sharing of understandings and working towards an agreed better future for the school, the efforts of individuals are likely to lack effectiveness because they do not form part of a coherent whole school plan" (Lewis, 2003, p. 263).

This concept of coherency lies at the heart of developing a schoolwide pedagogical framework for action which can only come to fruition if teachers are able to connect to the shared intent of such a framework which can then act as a framework for reflection over the long term. Schön (1987) talked about a professional 'repertoire' of skills to reflect-in-action (while processes are unfolding), and reflect-on-action (thinking back) in order to examine in detail meaning, knowledge creation, action and results. If organisations are to develop such a framework, and a repertoire of skills and shared mental models of best practice, then it will be necessary for people to learn new skills and develop new orientations that foster change for "entrenched mental models…thwart changes that could come from systems thinking" (Senge, 1990, p. 203). In IDEAS schools, shared mental models and collaborative reflection are often tied to a metaphorically rich school vision and contextually significant schoolwide pedagogical frameworks in order to keep goal centred intent upfront in the mind of the collective community (Andrews & Associates, 2011).

## 2.6.3 Linking meaning and metaphor

The role of organisational metaphor has proven to be a powerful one with regards to clarifying intent in a variety of contexts (Alvesson, 2002; Bohm, 1985, 1994, 1996; Kovecses, 2002; Lakoff & Johnston, 1980; Morgan, 1980; Samples, 1976; Simiricich, 1983; Tietze, 2003). Conceptual metaphors map a familiar concept in the source domain (the metaphorical image) with one trying to be understood in the target domain (Tietze, 2003). The power of metaphor in the changing landscape of education is that metaphor's 'inherent ambivalence' enables discussion about the unfamiliar to be conducted in relation to the familiar, thereby preserving tradition while allowing change to occur (Pondy, 1983).

However, "metaphor is inherently paradoxical. It can create powerful insights that also become distortions, as the way of seeing created through a metaphor becomes a way of *not* seeing" (Morgan, 1980, p. 5) and Strenski (1989) agrees, suggesting that "metaphors have consequences. They reflect and shape our attitudes and, in turn,

determine our behaviour" (p.137). With this cautionary note in mind, it is important to understand that metaphor represents one way in which humans make sense of their reality (Burke, 1954; Jakobson & Halle, 1956; Morgan, 1980; Ortony, 1979) and that metaphors are often used, consciously or sub-consciously to simplify the complexities of structures or understandings that abound (Cook-Sather, 2003; Morgan, 1980; Strenski, 1989).

Frequent changes in school staff and clientele present schools with the question of how to connect quickly and effectively with those new to the school culture and ways of working, and conscious metaphor use may be one of the possible answers. Saban (2006) believes powerful mental maps can be created by thinking of one thing in terms of another therefore "educators can understand educational phenomenon by relating (or comparing) them to something previously experienced and concrete" (p. 310). Many modern theorists believe that metaphor-like language maps connections across concepts or domains (Steen, 2008).

Ortony (1975) talks of metaphors as being necessary and Steen (2004) elaborates on the intensely communicative aspects of a deliberately chosen metaphor as being the "common ground of reference when difficult or complex topics are to be dealt with between interlocutors" (p. 230). Giddens (1976) sees in metaphor the power to shift paradigms by altering familiar premises through metaphorical allusion to the old, enabling comprehension of new frames of meaning which consequently sees one of metaphor's powers as the ability to bridge time and space (Carr, 2006). Chia (1996) noted how the word metaphor is derived from the Greek word 'metaphorikos' meaning transportation, lending further insight into metaphor's inherent ability to connect.

Ricouer (2003) sees the dual meanings inherent within metaphor as being meaning in stereo for he asks that if the essence of metaphor is to present one idea in the form of another then "Does not the procedure consist of as much in combining as substituting?" (p. 212). It is this combined or blended understanding of the metaphorical process that forms the basis for the terminology 'mental stereo imaging' that indicates how metaphor and similar literary tools facilitate the thinking of one concept in terms of another. Cameron (2003, p. 31) borrows the term *alterity* from Bakhtin (1984), to describe how metaphor can: locate understandings in a

specialised domain such as education or science; allow the users to connect at an emotional and social level if there is shared understanding of the metaphor as it creates a sense of intimacy; and, allow for shared interpretations of meaning. Steen (2008) expands the understanding of the power of metaphor as a communicative tool by devising a taxonomy of metaphor levels: the naming level (to bridge gaps in a language system); the framing level (offering conceptual frames of understanding); and, the perspective changing level or changing level (presenting an alternative perspective to a topic or message). Steen calls this taxonomy a three-dimensional model of metaphor which pays attention to metaphor in language and thought as well as in communication creating shared understandings.

## 2.7 Shared Language



**Reflection- Sharing Understandings**

*It is important to develop a shared language, so that teachers have a common understanding of the terminology being used. Where there is uncertainty about the meaning of terms or different understandings of what they mean, knowledge creation is restrained.*

Lewis, 2003, p. 257

Although it is well established that quality communication is essential to the development of effective learning communities (Isaacs, 1993; Isaacs & Smith, 1994; Senge, 1990), there is still little research that specifically links contextually specific communication attributes to the sustainability of such communities. And yet a common understanding of the terminology in daily use within a school is fundamental to knowledge creation (Lewis, 2003). Within a learning community, the ability to create shared meaning and elaborate on shared meaning is dependent on the existence of open and inclusive communication channels being in place and sustainable (Little & Horn, 2007).

Means of conveying knowledge and shared understandings are important components to consider in the striving for sustainable practice (Hord, 1992).

Sustainable school improvement is still an elusive goal for many schools and Fullan (2000) sees that "the challenge of moving from concept to capability – initiation to implementation to institutionalisation – continues" (p. xvii). Hord (1992) suggests that keeping clear documentation and visual records provides a form of organisational memory and a base for continued shared knowledge, information distribution, interpretation and implementation.

## 2.7.1 Language as a cultural process

How we interact with each other and our communities rests at the base of capacity building processes for language facilitates capacity building as "language is both the tool and the weapon a culture chooses to sculpt and constrain its own image" (Samples, 1976, p. 57). Within an organisation communicative capacity must therefore be developed to ensure that 'new and meaningful knowledge' can be created, shared and acted upon to maximise outcomes (Conway, 2008). Bohm (1996) in *On Dialogue* captures the type of communication needed for culture building to occur.

> Communication can lead to the creation of something new only if people are able freely to listen to each other, without prejudice, and without trying to influence each other. Each has to be ready to drop his old ideas and intentions, and be ready to go on to something different, when this is called for. (p. 3)

A collectively effective language, utilised in a spirit of uninhibited sharing, reflects the use of a range of learning and creative thinking skills and embeds new knowledge into mental models that enable action (Farago & Skyrme, 1995; Senge, 1990).

The consciousness of, and identification with, societal characteristics of a culture where particular and unique attitudes can thrive, implies an intense level of socialisation and deep communicative practice allowing culture to become internalised as "language constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 133). Through socialization mental models emerge as a synthesis of multiple mental images,

derived from internal and external, individual and group, systemic and school based models, selected according to their practical relevance and potential efficacy within their context (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Morgan, 1997; Senge, 1990).

Senge (1990) describes the depth of scrutiny needed within the learning organisation as being linked to the ability to carry on 'learningful' conversations that are open to the influence of others, while Owens (2004) states that to make a difference in schools we must first articulate our "basic assumptions manifest and consider how logical the connections are between these assumptions, our publicly espoused values and beliefs, and the organisational behaviour in which we engage in professional practice" (p. 4). Membership of a community is characterised by being able to communicate with other members of the community.

> Outsiders seem to be recognised by their inability to fit into the communications system…All communications are tensions of the individual, projections of our persona, increases in the range of our senses ...any society, large or small, ancient or modern, is co-terminus with its communications systems, that the society and its communications mutually define each other. (Wilson, 1968, pp. 5-7)

Language is integral to culture and culture influences the use and conventions of language within that culture. "Yet language and culture are often poorly understood… We live inside cultural processes, yet typically only understand culture in very superficial terms" (Lankshear, 1996, p. 17).

Language conventions are often culturally specific and therefore the thinking that accompanies the act of speaking is also directly linked to such conventions (Mead, 1951). Powell (2011) sees culture as "nothing more than sharing a common language. It influences our perspective, which in turn affects our behaviour and response to challenges" (para. 1). Therefore the way we think and what we think are integrally tied to the culture in which we coexist with others (Geertz, 1973).

Drawing on the work of Mead (1951), Geertz (1973) describes thinking in terms of a progression of closely linked significant symbols that help make meaning, "such symbols are thus not mere expressions, instrumentalities, or correlates of our

biological, psychological, and social existence; they are prerequisites of it. Without men, no culture, certainly; but equally, and more significantly, without culture, no men" (p. 49).

Meaning and culture are created by people living, working and communicating within a situated context (New London Group, 1996). As learners within a context we need new operational and cultural 'knowledges' and to "acquire new languages which provide access to new forms of work, social and private practices" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 11). With the technological, social and knowledge based changes in workplaces that have occurred over recent years there has been an increasing need for new ways of communicating and working together, and thus new 'languages' of interaction have been evolving (Kalantzis & Cope, 1996).

Meanings are co-created and yet at times unifying traits occur across cultures and contexts. Bourdieu's (1998) concept of situated subjectivities means that what matters is the searching for universal principles rather than cultural differences. He speaks of "the particularities of different collective histories" (p. 3). This meshes with what Reed-Danahay (2004) sees as Bourdieu's "interest in education as being the formal and informal modes of cultural transmission" (p. 38) highlighting how communication, culture and education are inexorably linked. Together this dual understanding lies at the heart of this current research project where universal similarities are being sought, as well as unique and contextually specific characteristics.

Lankshear (1996) sees the relationship between language and culture as being that: language is a precondition for cultural development and engagement; language is a cultural medium and process; and, language is a facilitator 'or broker' of cultural process. Socialisation of the language conventions indicates an enculturing of these into an organisation's field of acceptance with language and meaning being possible because human beings engage in "regular and patterned practice" (p. 20).

The formation of 'Culture' within an organisation can be both intentional and unintentional (Goswani, 2002). In learning communities the symbols and conventions of which Lankshear speaks may become conscious tools for creating the desired culture or representing the details of what a specific culture entails. "Verbal

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and non-verbal forms of language mediate the conceptualising, organising, reasoning, evaluating and communicating aspects of cultural activity and interaction" (Lankshear, 1996, p. 21) which strengthens the understanding of the part that metaphor may play in the enculturation process.

## 2.7.2 The language of socio-cognitive processing

As individuals and groups we explore our identities and place in the world using different types of language use that makes visible differing norms and values (Lankshear, 1996; Parker, 1998; Wiley, 1994). From a critical perspective "what is important is not the words (oral or written) themselves but the larger and specific coordinations of which they are a part and in which they gain their significance" (Gee, 1996, pp. 5-6). The taking of an interpretive perspective moves this thinking into a slightly different realm, as it is the specifics of how individuals and groups react and interact to create meaning within their context that indicates the 'Essence' of an individual or shared experience.

Socio-cognitive learning lies at the heart of school individuals and communities that value change in their personal professional practice and seek change that will improve their work and their schools (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). The majority of schools do not stand alone but are a part of a system. Information that originates in one part of a system is formulated into a message that is transmitted to another part of that system which builds capacity to pursue further connections (Krauss & Fussell, 1991). Here the co-creation of meaning is more difficult and the messages sent must be contextualised by those concerned if understanding of how to apply systems thinking is to be reached. The unpacking of systems thinking openly and transparently allows learning communities to build the professional capacity to deal with external and internal imperatives in a pro-active manner.

Building teacher professional capacity is built on social cognitive learning (Brookfield, 1986, Darling Hammond, 1999; Smylie et al., 2004; Zeichner, 2004) with teachers learning by discussing problems of practice with colleagues. Individuals contribute in unique ways to the collective and in so doing they change collective understandings. Brookfield (1995) believes that the best professional

learning occurs when: leadership and facilitation roles within discussion groups are shared among participants; learning is connected to practice and reflects on practice; and facilitation and learning is self-directed.

In the mid to late 1900's, Bandura's (1986) work on Social Cognitive Theory and Rotter's (1982) Social Learning Theory gained wide acceptance. Bandura emphasised observational learning while Rotter's concept of the locus of control had a major impact on the development of the generally accepted view that the role of social and cognitive variables are "inextricably linked to the final picture of who and what we are as individuals and how we make meaning of our world" (Emmitt & Pollock, 1991, p. 8).

A sociocultural approach to understanding how learning takes place is built on cognitively explicating the relationships between actions and understandings which are internalised and externalised, both as individuals and within groups, with distinct parallels and links between the two as they are positioned within context (Vygotsky, 1987; Wertsch, 1985). Teachers who are active learners have new and exciting ideas to share, and the excitement of their professional learning breathes life and energy into their classrooms and the classrooms of others (Mitchell & Sackney, 2007). Active learners are continually engaged with processes of making meaning.

Making meaning is knowledge intensive, and much of the knowledge school-based learning is required to develop and mobilise is knowledge involved in meaning making (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Proponents of a multiliteracies pedagogical approach to understanding language as a cultural construct take the stance that social practices, and therefore literacies in the broadest sense, are socially constructed. In relation to the current research project this means that specificities of terminology, imagery, classroom structures, and ways of working are selected with care and represent processes of cognition related to values, beliefs, purposes, and standards (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). They may also include hidden rules (underlying norms and assumptions) which may exclude others from fully participating in the meaning making process. These hidden rules are part of the historical context, the memories, from which norms and assumptions are generated.

### 2.7.3 Language as a facilitator of collective intelligence

The concept of clear documentation forming organisational memory is significant when reflecting on sustainable learning cultures (Hord, 2003). For a learning community to be able to learn and create new knowledge, a shared knowledge base must be formed (Senge, 1992). Records provide a starting point for teachers new to a school and help to continue a school's story over time, for a part of their nature is to carry the viewpoints, assumptions and experiences of the collective (Hord, 2003).

A shared language for learning needs to reflect the use of a wide range of creative thinking skills such as: inquiry (interviewing and seeking information); creativity (brainstorming and associating ideas); making sense of situations by organising information and thoughts; making choices by deciding courses of action; observing and discussing outcomes by recording, observation, comparison and deduction; and reframing knowledge by embedding new knowledge into mental models that form the basis for action (Farago & Skyrme, 1995; Senge, 1990).

Where overlapping groupings with common beliefs, interests and styles of expressing themselves exist, communities of discourse can be found (Adler & Bartholomew, 1992; Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). Bakhtin (1981) uses the term 'heteroglossia' to describe the inscription of multiple voices engaging in dialogue within a situation and believed that all language use is language use *from* a point of view, *in* a context, *to* an audience. Thus a shared language is a language construct which is common to those within a particular community, in a particular context within a particular ideology (Bakhtin, 1986).

However, in schools participating in this research, there is more to the language-in-use than 'from', 'in' and 'to'; instead *with* is fundamental to the meaning making process. For a shared language to be of significance in schools it must be co-constructed, reflecting the key characteristics of its culture. It must be capable of opening up the space where both individual and collective cognitive and social connections can be made. Habermas (1996, p. 576) gave major importance to the action of "opening communicative space". It was this dimension of action that he believed built solidarity and legitimacy thereby allowing understanding and collective decision making to eventuate.

It was at this point that the available literature began to raise a number of unanswered questions as it is only "relatively recently…(that) researchers (have) begun to look at the actual dialogue among teachers to locate evidence that will help us understand why some kinds of conversation prove powerful in pushing the boundaries of teaching and learning while others prove less generative" (Little & Horn, 2007, p. 80). Little and Horn provide indicators related to Senge's (1990)'learningful' dialogue as being: conversations that do "more than simply report on or point to problems of practice"(p. 81); an organised discussion framework for the identification, elaboration and reconceptualising of teacher concerns; and, dialogue that exposes or generates principles of practice. These understandings of learning filled conversations connect with Freire's (2000) concept of 'culture circles' which he saw as being circles of adult learners where an atmosphere of trust was established based on seeking and hearing the learner's voice in a similar manner to Palmer's (2007) 'circles of trust'.

The verbalisation of practical knowledge by teachers is often difficult because, for the most part it is tacit knowledge, knowledge which teachers have not consciously learnt (Nonaka, 1991). It has a difficult to define or mysterious quality similar to that which forms the basis of intuition, hunches and premonitions. "When teachers do disclose their practical knowledge, their talk contains little reference to the knowledge categories…instructional theory, educational psychology, educational sociology, educational philosophy and the like. The language that they use is the language of experience" (Marland, 1996, p. 254). Lanigan's (1988) work in communicology explores the ways in which language, discourse and gesture (all psycho-social practices) reflect the lived experiences of the individual and the group.

## 2.7.4 Language use and qualitative research

By examining multifaceted texts (many of them 'dialogic exchanges'), I aimed to demonstrate the connection between language and the ability to act. In an attempt to capture deep understandings of the schools within this study and their cultures, and the power of their 'language-in-use', it was necessary to go deeper into the impact that these cultures and their cultural representations have on others (Freebody & Baker, 1996). It was with this in mind that a teacher considered to have new insights into each school was asked to be a part of each participant group.

### 2.7.5 The lived experience of language use in IDEAS school

When working within the cluster network for the purposes of IDEAS project delivery of which I was a part, it became obvious that school leaders sharing practice (which includes teacher leaders), helped to not only inspire others to try new approaches to achieving better outcomes within their schools but also led to the development of cognitive connections to the learning process itself. The more teachers became learners and shared the difficulties and triumphs embedded within the learning experience, the stronger and more empowered they became as learners (Andrews & Lewis, 2007; Conway & Abawi, 2011). It was surmised that the visual and verbal stories of these teachers and their communities would capture the lived experiences which were sought. De Certaux (1984) saw stories and narrative as the means of making values coherent within particular situations.

This current research project seeks to not only make coherent the essence of a language entwined with the values, visions and pedagogical intent of these learning communities to others, but by so doing produce more generalised statements applicable across all contexts, thereby developing new understandings of the importance of a school's daily language-in-use.

## 2.8 Summarising the Literature Review Spiral

The challenge of change faces all sectors of the workforce (Cheng & Caelli, 2007; Fullan, 2008; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Sleigh, 2008). The stress factors related to dealing with educational change are causing concern as both teachers and leaders face ongoing pressure from external technological, societal and political forces, as well as internal feelings of inadequacy (Bohannor, 2006; ETUCE, 2009; Gelston, 2008; Kyriacou, 2001; Punch & Tuetteman, 1996; Richter & Buttery, 2004; Wallington, 2002). Ways of working in the past are proving to be no longer adequate to meet the needs of students today (Cuttance, 2001; Day, 2003; Gravett & Thornton, 2007; Mitchell & Sackney, 2007; Mulford & Johns, 2004).

Over the past decade school improvement aimed at creating learning organisations has sought to move schools into this new era (Hall & Hord, 1987; Harris, 2003b; Hopkins, 2001; Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Newmann &

Associates, 1996; Owens, 2004; Spender, 1997). Learning communities are being formed within organisations committed to distributed leadership (Harris, 2003a; Lambert, 2002, 2003; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Teachers are being acknowledged as being central to school improvement (Crowther et al., 2001, Darling-Hammond, 1997). There is agreement that quality leadership that engenders the development of sustainable quality learning by both teachers and students needs to be both open and distributed (Busche & Shani, 1991; Fullan, 2001b; MacGregor, 1960; Mulford & Silins, 2003). This type of school restructuring requires principals to become metastrategic leaders able to put processes in place which build the capacities of those around them and thus develop teacher leadership capacity (Barth, 2001; Chapman, 2003b; Crowther et al., 2002; Hadfield, 2003; Hargreaves, 2001; Limerick et al., 1998; Mulford, 2007) as well as improve pedagogical practices across the board (Day, 2000; Glatthorn, 1995). Practice must be focussed on contextual needs as well as systemic, with student need pointing the direction forward and being reinforced by what teachers believe are the priorities for their students (Block & Hazelip, 1995; Fullan, 2011; Sleigh, 2008).

For this focus to be clear, tacit understandings must be made explicit (Nonako & Nishiguchi, 2001) and shared reflections on current practice must be forthcoming (Mitchell & Sackney, 2007). A breaking down of basic assumptions is required (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Schein, 2002), as is the establishment of shared mental models built from deep understanding of quality practice (Hofstede, 1998). The creation of new knowledge (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Lewis, 2003), and growth in collective intelligence (Conway, 2008; Hargreaves, 2003; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003) becomes possible when there is a shared meaning system in place (Conway, 2008; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). Such a meaning system is a product of culture (Geertz, 1973; Schein, 2002). Building new cultures built on the concepts of no blame, trust and optimism form the basis for sustainable school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Crowther et al., 2002; Crowther & Associates, 2011; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

In order to create a clear sense of direction for the school community a clearly articulated 'Vision', values and principles of practice must be acknowledged and understood by the whole school community (Crowther & Andrews, 2003; Jones,

Moore & Snyder, 1988). With such a foundation in place the depth of learning that occurs builds learning communities capable of sustained quality performance (Hord, 2003; Mitchell & Sackney, 2007; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). Quality performance is seen to be largely possible due to the sense of collective commitment and support established within a group and the clarity of the pedagogical articulation that has occurred (Crowther & Associates, 2011; Leach & Moon, 2008). Social-cognitive learning (Berger & Luckmann, 1996 ) and knowledge as a practice based social construct (Bandura, 1995; Damon, 1991; McLellan, 1996) lies at the heart of articulated best practice, shared identity and shared commitment to improvement (Crowther & Associates, 2011; Owens, 2004).

A shared language rich with metaphor and imagery has the potential to play a role of major importance in developing and sustaining shared understandings of culture and meaning (Conway, 2008; Gee, 1996; Geertz, 1973; Hord, 2003). There are many indicators of the power of metaphor to delineate cultural understandings (Alvesson, 2002; Cameron, 2003, 2007; Carr, 2006; Goddard et al., 2004; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Morgan, 1997; Ricouer, 1973; Samples, 1976; Steen, 2008). Visual reinforcements, such as cultural artefacts, are both a product and a reinforcement of culture (Bourdieu, 1998; Cook-Sather, 2003; Geertz, 1998; Strenski, 1989). Together metaphor and imagery are seen to simplify complex concepts and bridge time and space, as well as generally strengthen shared understandings (Chia, 1996; Giddens, 1976; Krauss & Morstella, 1997; Pondy, 1983).

The current research undertaken seeks to explore the phenomenon of a contextually specific shared language by capturing the lived experience of school practitioners in schools that have undergone the process of school revitalisation called IDEAS (Crowther et al., 2002). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach is used to find the essence of this phenomenon (Dilthey, 1924; Gadamer, 1986; Habermas, 1990; Macann, 1993; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1997). What was being sought was an understanding of the importance of this language in relation to on-going school improvement and the creation of dynamic and sustainable learning communities. This required a 'whole picture' view of the many facets to be found and it was possible that additional understandings related to other fields of knowledge would be sought once analysis was underway.

# CHAPTER 3 : THE METHODOLOGY

Methodology provides the philosophical groundwork for methods. Qualitative researchers are philosophers in the "universal sense in which all human beings…are guided by highly abstract principles" (Bateson, 1972, p. 320). These principles are a combination of ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs and ultimately shape how the researcher sees and interprets the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

## 3.1 The Phenomenological Stance

By taking a phenomenological stance, I am clearly identifying that my interpretations are influenced by my own set of beliefs and values regarding the 'language-in-use' phenomenon in question. "Phenomenological research aims…to study how human phenomenon are experienced in consciousness, in cognitive and perceptual acts, as well as how they may be valued or appreciated aesthetically" (Wilson, 2002, p. 1) and the selection of this approach is a key indicator as to the world view that I hold as 'the researcher' (van Manen, 1997). As a phenomenologist this means identifying my desire to explore some aspect of lived experience related to 'Being' in a life-world made up of inter-subjective, co-constructed meanings and being aware that "those entering the field of human research may need to realize that the very meanings of 'knowledge', 'science', 'theory', and 'research' are based upon different assumptions" (van Manen, 1997, p. 20).

### 3.1.1 The research orientation of the inquiry

This human science research is conducted within a blended paradigm – a melding of a social-constructivist approach (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Vygotsky, 1962) where meaning is seen to be constructed out of social encounters, and an interpretive one where researchers analyse the meanings individuals place on their own and others' experiences and actions (Weber, 1958). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) see research as knowledge creation, and the researcher's perspective as to how knowledge is created, underpinning the researcher's priorities and approaches taken. Both interpretivism and constructivism belong to "a loosely coupled family of methodological and philosophical persuasions…best regarded as sensitizing

concepts…they merely suggest directions along which to look rather than provide descriptions of what to see" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 40). All of which is vividly captured by Geertz (1973):

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (p. 5)

It was with these understandings in mind that I decided that the methodological approach appropriate for this research focus was that of hermeneutic phenomenology (Dilthey, 1957; Gadamer, 1975; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; van Manen, 1990). Van Manen defines the qualities of the hermeneutic phenomenological method as being naturalistic and aimed at "reclaiming lived experience as it is lived rather than as it is represented in abstract theory or in binary oppositions like thinking and feeling, cognition and emotion, action and reflection" and that it involves "modes of discourse, voice, and expression that can reveal felt meaning that goes beyond the prevailing paradigm of logic, cognition, prediction, and control" (van Manen, 1997, p. xvii).

The research questions arose from a desire to understand the lived experience of educational practitioners living with a 'common language' within schools that had undertaken the school renewal process called 'Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools' or IDEAS (Crowther, 1999). As an outcome of participating in the IDEAS process there was existing documented evidence that a number of school communities had created and utilised a contextually specific common language (Andrews & Associates, 2011; Conway, 2008; Lewis, 2003).

This phenomenon, combined with my own lived experience, appeared to me to be a powerful catalyst for building social and intellectual capacity within a school community through its power to make social and cognitive connections. The nature of the phenomenological approach and the nature of what I was aiming to capture were well aligned.

## 3.2 The Research Problem

**The main question:**

What is the underlying significance of a contextually constructed language within the life-world of three Australian schools engaged in the IDEAS process of on-going school improvement?

**The sub-questions**:

- What are the fundamental characteristics of a contextually specific language-in-use within the lived experiences of three Australian school communities that have undertaken the IDEAS process of school improvement?

- Of what significance is the presence and utilisation of this language within the 'life-world' of the educators at these schools?

- How can understanding the essence of such a language be of practical use in other contexts?

## 3.3 Finding the Way – Research Complexity

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) believe we live "in a new age where messy, uncertain, multi-voiced texts, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of fieldwork, analysis, and intertextual representation" (p. 38). Their insight into the needs of current research confirmed my intent of capturing multiple views in multiple ways and then portraying the findings by creating a means of capturing 'intertextual representation' and 'multi-voiced texts' to represent the essence of what it is like to live with a contextually constructed language both first hand and in combination with the experiences of others.

Since "the hermeneutic impulse in cultural studies evaluates the value of research in terms of how sensitive it is to the lived realities of its informants" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 344), the focus of dialogic exchange analysis within this research was centred on bringing to light underlying themes and essences of the lived realities of the informants within this study – including my own insights as an informant. However, transcribed dialogic texts alone were not enough

to create the complete picture of what transpired in these schools. Many of the messages conveyed and much of the language-in-use that abounds in schools is visual and the result of actions. These actions arise from the cognitive understandings and engagement by individuals and groups within the school as stronger and more collaborative collegial relationships evolve.

The capturing of perceptions around the blending of inner and outer worlds was central to the research project. "The consciousness of the person is simultaneously directed to an inner world of thought and experience and to an outer world of events and experience" (Denzin, 1984, p. 28). In turn these can be seen as opposites of the same or a blending of the streams of consciousness and experience (Denzin, 1984). My role as the researcher was to be the extractor of meaning from these streams, while at the same time being a contributor of personal experiential knowledge to the data base. At play was a double hermeneutic process of interpretation contributing to the perspectives articulated and the new knowledge created (Giddens, 1976). In an effort to do justice to the data, a hybrid writing style – a melding of an academic approach with a more creative writing style – was chosen to replicate the blending of theoretical and experiential understandings of self and others as they emerged from the lived experiences being captured.

As human beings acting and interacting in the world, we each bring our own interpretations to how we live our questions and experience the answers that eventuate. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that "all research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world" (p. 22). Qualitative research explores events, people and phenomenon in their natural setting and the qualitative researcher must be positioned in a manner which best allows for examination of the world in which this takes place. The researcher's aim is to make interpretive practices concrete in order for others to engage with the understandings that emerge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002).

## 3.3.1 The qualitative research paradigm

As a qualitative researcher, artefacts such as presentations, field notes, conversations, interviews, recordings, photographs, and songs hold significance as tools and artefacts that portray experiences in the world (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1990; Wilson,

2002). The role of the qualitative researcher is to study things in their natural settings and to interpret such artefacts and their place within the phenomenon "in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, p. 3).

Lanigan (1992) defines qualitative methodology as "the practice of using a necessary and/or sufficient condition method in order to compare and contrast choices made within a taken context of artifactual, symbolic, substantial, or *Formal Capta"* (p. 222). He goes on to describe how in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology *capta* is seen as 'transcendent capability' the concept of 'I can; I am able to'. Within this current research project the aim was to capture not only the 'I can; I am able to' but also the 'we can; we are able to', much of which occurs through the act of speaking for "speech, as distinguished from language, is that moment when the significative intention (still silent and wholly intact) proves itself capable of incorporating itself into my culture and the culture of others – of shaping me and others" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 197).

Phenomenology embodies the essence of qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Founding phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Schutz made invaluable contributions to the validation of practice within interpretative research and highlighted the main concept of phenomenology as a means of seeking understanding about how we experience the world and how we construct meaning out of that experience (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenology can be said to be inter-subjective in nature as our experiences are filtered with, and through the eyes of, others and "whatever meaning we create has its roots in human actions, and the totality of social artefacts and cultural objects is grounded in human activity" (Wilson, 2002, p. 1).

## 3.3.2 Naturalistic inquiry

Naturalistic inquiry, such as this, is inherently open to interpretation and description. Moments of time, unique experiences and significant actions are captured as images of a bigger picture. Such research is not confined to a laboratory setting or a controlled environment but is instead taken from real situations, natural settings in which lived experience is enacted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985,

2000; van Manen, 1997; Wilson, 2002). What is sought within qualitative research is a "holistic interpretation in the natural setting" (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 13). It is this wholeness view of inherent meaning within an experienced phenomenon within its natural setting that hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to capture because "man is essentially an explorer of a transcendental realm of meaning. In other words, we live in meaning, and we live *towards*, oriented to experience" (Barua, 2007, p. 2).

To interpret lived experience as it is naturally situated is itself open to differing interpretations, as can be evidenced in the varied research paradigms which guide qualitative research today: positivism; post-positivism; interpretivism; constructivism; queer theory; critical theory; feminism; cultural study models; racialised discourses and hermeneutics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and research strategies vary as much as the paradigms themselves. By taking a hermeneutic approach I took on Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) ultimate participatory interpreter role, an observer who explores in depth the 'life-world' of which they and their subjects are a part. Cultural artefacts, observations and dialogic exchanges are used as representations of lived experiences taken from natural settings.

### 3.3.3 Origins of hermeneutic phenomenology

Habermas'(1990) explanation of how the artefacts of cultural existence are an objectification of meaning, and therefore open to observation and interpretation, describes the fundamental positioning of the multifaceted texts within this investigation:

> Any meaningful expression – be it an utterance, verbal or nonverbal, or an artefact of any kind, such as a tool, an institution, or written document – [that] can be identified from a double perspective, both as an observable event and as an understandable objectification of meaning. (pp. 23-24)

It is only possible to truly understand speech, the written word or the visual representation of it, if we know who the transmitter of the message was, to whom it

was addressed, the reason behind formulation of the message and the authenticity or appropriateness of the message "in short, when we know *what makes it acceptable*" (Habermas, 1998, p. 232).

Habermas' concept of hermeneutics and existential phenomenology, based around his pragmatic theory of meaning, is a far more 'particular' and analytical approach than the more 'essence' centred explorations of Gadamer, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Dilthey (Macann, 1993; van Manen, 1990). The writings of Dilthey (1957), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Ricouer (1974), in conjunction with perspectives taken from van Manen (1990), form the conceptual resource bank from which my approach to the current research draws valuable insights.

> Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xiii)

The preface to Gadamer's (1988) 'Truth and Method' identifies that "What makes 'coming to an understanding' possible is language, which provides *mitte,* the 'medium' or 'middle ground', the 'Place' where an understanding, as we say, 'takes place'…language is the *Vermittlung*, the communicative mediation which establishes common ground" (p. xvii). Therefore, I have taken the approach that a contextually constructed language-in-use is the communicative mediation which establishes common ground for discussion purposes.

Recent interpretations of the hermeneutic principle of understanding local realities view research in more interactive terms, as happening in the dialogic space between the Self of the researcher and the 'Other' world of the person being researched (Buber, 1970). The dialogic interest in 'Other' worlds places significant emphasis on emotional and embodied forms of knowledge and understanding, understood to be neglected by rationalistic facts focussed scientific research (Denzin, 1997).

In striving to uncover new understanding and meaning from the lived experiences of individuals within a school collective, Gadamer's (1988) insight into Helmholtz's two kinds of induction were considered: logical and artistic-instinctive

(*psychological)* induction particularly in light of the interpretative nature of research. Both can be seen reflected in the 'Montages of Meaning' which emerge throughout the data analysis. Pre-understandings underpin interpretation and these can be seen as 'horizons' and the act of understanding that follows as "the fusion of horizons" (Gadamer, 2000, p. 397). It is not possible to have totally objective knowledge as our backgrounds, experiences, cultures and education influence how we perceive the world, therefore a more accurate way of viewing reality can be achieved by fusing one's own perspective with insights into others, therefore creating a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1988; Malpas, 2009).

Dilthey (1924) emphasised that although details associated with the reality of lived experience can be explained "through purely intellectual processes…we *understand* through the cooperation of all the powers of the mind activated by apprehension" (p. 172, *my emphasis*). Apprehension is the channel through which interpretation and 'making sense' of lived experience flows (Dilthey, 1924). Merleau-Ponty (1962) sought to make sense of experience by an interpretive process consisting of four phases: description, reduction, essences and intentionality. The last two of these phases have been combined and represented as interpretation (Lanigan, 1992; Macann, 1993).

Heidegger's ontological approach to interpreting the world centred on "Being-in-the-world" (Macann, 1993, p. 59) and was strongly linked to the question posed "What is language?" (van Manen, 1997, p. 46), while Sartre, with his existential phenomenological approach to phenomenology, rekindled "the flame of dualism" (*Being-for-itself* and *Being-for-others*) combined into the "monism of the phenomenon" (Macann, 1993, p.112). The phenomenon of a contextually specific language-in-use needed to be explored in relation to the perceptions of those who created, lived and utilised it in their 'life-world' which led once again to the work of Merleau-Ponty.  In 'The Phenomenology of Perception', Merleau-Ponty (1962) explores human reality from the point of perception. "Perception being the primary function of the human organism and the human body constituting the only adequate foundation for a theory of perception" (Macann, 1993, p. 160). With perception

being fore-fronted in this manner, the significance of interpreting the 'signs and symbols' that are the essence of language (Lanigan, 1992; Seung, 1982; Wiley, 1994) rose in prominence.

### 3.3.4 The birth of the symbol

The significance of the meaning and the importance of the 'signs and symbols' within their context required unpacking in order to answer the research questions. "The gift of meaning from the symbol…(is that)…the symbol gives…occasion of thought, something to think about" (Ricouer, 1967, p. 348). Ricouer's (1967) concept of individual interpretation in conjunction with 'the symbol' resonates with Merleau-Ponty's (1945) understanding of the individual, or subject, being 'in action' perceiving their world and its messages and that phenomenology is the study of essence both of perception and cognition.

Ricouer (1974) sees symbolism within words and speech possessing double meanings. "The symbolic resides…in this ordered play of natural symbolism, of abstract allegorism, and of historical typology" (p. 60) and "insofar as the signs intersignify among themselves...they enter into relations of substitution and so make the metaphoric process possible" (p. 72). Ricouer (1974) speaks of analogy, allegory, simile, metaphor and the like, as being linked within the concept of polysemy.

> Polysemy signifies that at a given moment a word has more than one meaning…but [that] this definition lacks the essential point, which concerns not the structure but the process. Now this process of the transfer of meaning – of metaphor – supposes that the word is a cumulative entity, capable of acquiring new dimensions of meaning without losing the old ones. It is this cumulative metaphorical process which is projected over the surface of the system as polysemy. (p. 93)

This process at play sees the birth of the symbol (Lanigan, 1992, p. 100). In an educational context this metaphorical process, as described by Ricouer, is capable of connecting educators and a community in unique and powerful ways. Verbal and visual symbols engender common understandings which are often linked to images

and metaphors capable of transcendent meaning stretching beyond one given context (Carr, 2006; Morgan, 1997; Ortony, 1975; Steen, 2008). Morgan (1997, p. 348) identifies how symbolism and metaphor can 'imprison or set free' organisational thought and practice. It follows that educational metaphors require conscious consideration and monitoring within schools and classrooms. Metaphors assist in the formation of strong mental models which in Senge's terms are "deeply held internal images of how the world works" (Senge, 1990, p. 8). These internal images act as filters, determining to some degree what we classify as important and what we do not, thus influencing how we choose to be imprisoned or set free.

One aim of this research was to read and interpret the metaphorical and mental modelling processes at play within the three participating schools. Under particular scrutiny were the visual, textual, dialogical, structural and actioned forms of these processes as they unfolded within the three participating schools. It was anticipated that the findings related to this aim would hold the key to unlocking the qualities of uniqueness within each school and the 'Essence' of the phenomenon itself. It was the metaphorical process positioned within the educational context of a shared language-in-use that I chose to call 'mental stereo imagining'.

## 3.3.5 Identifying the 'Essence' in hermeneutic phenomenology

A distinction can be made between interpretation that is pointing to something and interpretation that is pointing out the meaning of something (Gadamer, 1988, p. 68). However, regardless of which is exposed, it is the essence that is being sought. "The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of …lived experience" (van Manen, 1997, p. 10). By being part of the lived experience of a contextually specific language-in-use within a school, by spending time and being in each of the schools and by being a part of the data set and the methodology through my own interpretative stance, I aim to capture the sense of 'Being' that the *essence* of this language-in-use conveys.

Heidegger's 'Being' must be viewed as a whole for 'Being (the existing)' to be truly seen (Macann, 1993). This is the true challenge with which all phenomenological researchers must grapple (Macann, 1993). Capturing the 'Essence' of the role played

by the phenomenon in question will bring new meaning to what it means to the 'Being' of communicating and will make us "thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted" (van Manen, 1993, p. 8).

## 3.3.6 Max van Manen and the phenomenological method

Phenomenology can be distinguished from other forms of qualitative research by the emphasis that is placed on the subjective point of view because the researcher must reflect on lived experience in relation to some aspect of meaning filled experience. Such reflection should be free from prejudicial, suppositional, or even theoretical interference (van Manen, 2007). A phenomenological researcher explores the lived experiences of participants in relation to a phenomenon. Such research may be performed within the natural setting or by means of interpreting the texts and times of the experiences as recalled by the participant. Therefore, conscious articulation is the key to portraying individual experience in a manner that can be experienced by others. "The thesis that consciousness constitutes the world is the thesis that the being-there (Dasein) for us of the world and of anything that is in it is an achievement (Leistung) of consciousness" (McKenna, 1982, p. 6).

Phenomenology in the human sciences seeks to organise and analyse data to display individual and composite textural and structural descriptions resulting in a synthesis of meaning and essences (Moustakas, 1994). With its emphasis on interpreting lived experiences it has been widely used in the fields of both nursing (Balls, 2009; Crotty, 1996; Walton, 1994) and psychology research, as well as media and the arts (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2008), but less frequently in education. The appeal of phenomenology as a research methodology in education is "that it tries to understand the phenomenon of education by maintaining a view of pedagogy as an expression of the whole, and a view of the experiential situation as the topos of real pedagogic acting" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7).

Max van Manen's work in phenomenological research has, I believe, led the way in regards to portraying the essence of educational experiences. He argues that:

> Pedagogy requires a phenomenological sensitivity to lived experience...a hermeneutic ability to make interpretive sense of the phenomenon of the life-world...[and to]...play with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection to contribute to one's pedagogical thoughtfulness and tact. (van Manen, 1990, pp. 1-2)

Phenomenological research is based in a philosophy of the unique that wishes to uncover what is "essentially not replaceable" (van Manen, 1997, p. 7).

Phenomenology's need to extrapolate the lived experiences of an identifiable phenomenon by individuals and groups within their life-worlds (van Manen, 1997) lies at the very heart of phenomenology as it brings "to reflective awareness the nature of the events experienced in our natural attitude (and) we are able to transform or remake ourselves in the true sense of Bildung [education]" (p. 7). The importance of this life-world view is that it is the phenomenon as lived by a person, a whole being, complete with worldviews, relationships and alternative experiences. It is within the life-world that the person has the lived experience. "Only in thought does it (lived experience) become objective" (Dilthey, 1985, p. 223). Phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through (van Manen, 1997b).

## 3.4 The Role of Hermeneutic Phenomenological Researcher

As a phenomenological researcher I saw my role as being to capture, within context, consciousness of self and others and then to translate or interpret the essence of these understandings of lived experience into understandings and possibilities applicable to other learning communities. That knowledge is socially constructed is well documented (Austin, 2005; Bahktin, 1981; Buber, 2002; Conway, 2008; Holquist, 1990; Midgley, 2011; Thorogood, 1997). Conscious knowledge can be viewed as dependent on prior social experiences as

one can speak "by" and "to" oneself as only with a grammar that has a social history...In further probing the linguistic and actional texture of consciousness we find that it displays vectors of understanding soliciting a comprehension of self and world. It is thus that one can speak of dialogical consciousness as hermeneutical. Consciousness as a hermeneutic event displays an *interpretation* of self and world. (Schrag, 2003, p. 172)

This stricture adds weight to the importance placed on the phenomenological researcher's receptiveness to the experiences and perceptions of others situated within their shared contexts and within their own lived experiences. In many respects while researching the complex nature of lived experience I became a bricoleur using "the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft, deploying whatever strategies, methods, and empirical materials are at hand" (Becker, 1998, p. 2 as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4) to capture the messages being conveyed to me.



*As I understand my task – I must carefully look at my past and interpret what I see, I must delve into the past lived experiences of others, I must strive to interpret images and actions as they unfold before me, while allowing these 'other' voices to speak to me of hopes, dreams, difficulties, frustrations – in other words the colours and textures of their lived experiences. Therefore, it is a 'big picture' or meta-view of lived experience that is the aim of this approach.*

## 3.4.1 The researcher as writer and image maker

Van Manen's (1997) approach to hermeneutic phenomenological research is one that sees the act of writing as a means of fixing thoughts to paper.

It externalizes what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world…writing creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences…to make some aspect of our lived world, of our experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible. (pp. 125-126)

He explores how the final form of writing may be organised as: emergent themes; reconstructed life stories; anecdotes; linking one's writing with the thinking of other phenomenological authors; weaving description "against the existentials of temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), sociality (lived relationship to others)" (van Manen, 1990, p. 172); or by inventing an approach (p. 173). Van Manen (1997) states these are 'not mutually exclusive' and emphasises that in human science research "there is no systematic argument, no sequence of propositions that we must follow in order to arrive at a conclusion… because that would be to see writing itself as a technical method" (p. 173).

Therefore, an exact description of the phenomenological method is difficult to obtain, however, there are guidelines and themes that have come to be understood as effective means of gaining insight into the 'life-world' (van Manen, 1993, p. 30). Van Manen (1990) gives this methodical structure of human science research as a guide for the hermeneutic phenomenological researcher (pp. 30-31):

1. turn to a phenomenon which seriously interests you and commits you to the world;

2. investigate experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;

3. reflect on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

4. describe the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

5. maintain a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;

6. balance the research context by considering parts and wholes.

It is this guide that I used to reflect on the lived experience of education practitioners using a contextually constructed language-in-use within the 'life-world' of three primary schools that have been through the IDEAS process (Crowther, 1999). However, from the beginning the fourth point was expanded on to include music, interpretive action, visual representations, and even structural spaces, as all hold a significant place within the communication practices of each school. Therefore my rewording of point four is as follows: *4. describe the phenomenon through the art of imaging and re-imaging.*

The cognitive-aesthetic choices to be made regarding choosing appropriate research methods and materials and the most meaningful way to interpret and present data resonated not only with my 'artistic/musical self' but also with my inner eye. The limitations of two dimensional media meant that I confined my 'visions' to montages of written text illustrated with pictorial images, figures and the juxtaposing of text with visual and verbal metaphor.

The Oxford Dictionary of Art (n.d.) defines montage as: "A pictorial technique in which a number of cut-out illustrations, or fragments of them, are arranged together and mounted on a suitable background; the term also refers to the picture so created. Ready-made images alone are used...". Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe montage as being like jazz where "improvisation create(s) the sense that images, sounds and understandings are blending together, overlapping, forming a composite, a new creation" (p. 4). Cook (1981), and Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe montage in relation to cinematography as using brief images to create a sense of urgency and complexity which invites viewers to construct interpretations that build on one another as a scene unfolds. Interpretations are based on contrasting images that blend into one another and which are viewed simultaneously, and not sequentially, in order to create meaning.

Within this study each montage was created from the 'ready made images' available and taken from a number of perspectives and from a number of sources. It is the complexity and variety of the data that gives research trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1973) to both the methodology and the final findings of this research, as any one or two views alone would have dissected the whole into disconnected parts. Through the interpretive nature of the montagic designs occurring throughout this thesis, images became overlapped with words, spaces and textures or sometimes superimposed as the themes and essence of a contextually specific language became clear. It is the intrinsic character of these multifaceted texts that reveal the true experience of living with a contextually specific language-in-use in the 'life-world' of IDEAS schools. It is this nature that draws the overlapping interpretations into 'webs of significance' (Weber, 1958) which can be interpreted as phenomenological 'Being' (Heidegger, 1962).

### 3.4.2 Seeking 'Essence'

It is the role of the phenomenological researcher/writer to portray the double-edged dimensions as well as the enlightenment of 'ah-ha' moments or the breathless, heart stopping moments when 'Being' comes into being (van Manen, 1997). The silence of 'Being' or life itself which can be described as ontological silence, follows moments of the "greatest and most fulfilling insight or meaningful experience" when we know we are in the presence of truth (van Manen, 1997, p. 114). As a phenomenological writer my intent was to construct the style of text (verbal and visual) that will "suddenly swell with a meaning which overflows into the other person when the act of speaking [or writing] binds them up into a single whole" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 235).

Such moments, where phenomenological 'essence' is to be found, must be captured in ways that awaken others to the excitement of discovery. It is at this time, at this moment of cognitive elucidation, that the image maker must put pen to paper, or finger to keyboard, so as not to let the truth of this moment of 'Being' fade into the canvas or be overlaid with other less worthy images. The italicised reflections which are embedded throughout these pages are captured moments of my understanding of 'Being', of 'Indicators of Essence' as they emerged. These 'Indicators of Essence' become essential to the interpretive process unfolding. They have been captured in text boxes with broken outlines throughout the later chapters of this thesis.

### 3.4.3 Locating the silences in the text

While reading and interviewing I had become conscious of the significance of the silences (van Manen, 1997b) that sometimes rested between the spoken exchanges of participants. Capturing silence in a written text is difficult to achieve, however, through montage it is possible through the 'spaces' between representations to indicate how meanings emerged from processes of reflection and silent cognitive action. The 'dialogic exchanges' and the spaces in between exchanges within the data transcripts and montages reflect the interpretive and hermeneutic endeavours used by the interlocutors involved (Bakhtin, 1981; Gadamer, 1988). The emphasis I have placed on exchanges is intentional as without the exchange of ideas and the silence of the between, true understanding and participation in the creation of shared

meaning would not have been possible. "Phenomenologists like to say that nothing is so silent as that which is taken-for-granted or self-evident" (van Manen, 1997b, p. 112). Belief in the significance of this sense of silence was present from the start, however, its exact place in the interpretive analytical process was yet to emerge.

 "A focus on inert objective information threatens to render the dialogic monologic" (Slattery, Krasney, & O'Malley, 2006, p. 541) with little chance of the 'taken-for-granted' being elevated to a higher plane. However, the power of 'skilful discussions' (Senge, 1994) and 'professional conversations' in the IDEAS sense (Crowther, Andrews et al., 2002) is that the objective is rendered subjective and dialogic by the very act of *exchange*, as together individuals share understandings related to previously taken-for-granted interpretations of experience. Within an IDEAS professional conversation moments of silence are allowed to stand 'as is' whenever they emerge so as to allow deep thinking to occur. When first attempted, allowing silence to continue is surprisingly difficult to achieve, but none-the-less essential to the meaning making process that was at play in each of the schools. It lies at the heart of collective double-loop learning cycle (Schön, 1987; Senge, 1990) allowing difficult to change fundamental values and beliefs to evolve as new knowledge is brought to light and then critiqued.

## 3.4.4 The phenomenological research partnership

Within the phenomenological research partnership both parties, the researcher and the participants, question what is said in order to explore deeper meanings and to interrogate experiences to ensure that the 'lived experience' has been captured (Abawi, 2011). In some ways the researcher would best be called a 'participant-researcher' and the participants called 'researcher-participants'. Each party plays an essential role as co-interpreters of the data.

> And thus the interview turns indeed into an interpretive conversation wherein both partners self-reflectively orient themselves to the interpersonal or collective ground that brings the significance of the phenomenological question into view. (van Manen, 1997, p. 99)

Data collected with regards to personal anecdotal reflections, verbal and visual images, observation, text analysis and interview transcripts were presented back to participants in order to mobilise reflection on the accumulated experience of 'we' in a search for deeper meanings and 'big picture' themes. This did not occur in a formal manner but was an integral and accepted component of the dialogic exchanges throughout the data collection process. If any element remained unclear in any party's mind then at the end of an interview or observation session emergent questions were asked. Here again the spaces within these reflective discussions became resonating chambers for the echoing and bouncing around of ideas about the significance or otherwise of the varying representations and narratives.

A partnership of learning such as that illustrated in Figure 3.1 requires a flexible openness to new ideas on the part of the researcher. Preconceived ideas, notions of research direction and content requirements are all susceptible to change. This presents a cognitive challenge as one's mind must become like an unexposed piece of film or a blank canvas ready to implant images as they arise whether they be sought or unsought, expected or unexpected.



**The Phenomenological Research Partnership**

The Participant Researcher
- instigator of the key *Ph Q*
- receptive to altered perception
- a listener/ observer/ creator
- the capturer of imagery

Clarifying themes

Creating Images of Essence

The Researcher Participants –
- partners in the research process experts about own experience
- reflectors on *Ph Q*
- possibly new themes creators
- partners in bouncing ideas

Figure 3.1 The Phenomenological Research Partnership. The abbreviation of PhQ refers to the Phenomenological Question.

It was the consciousness of the inclusive nature of the research partnership that led me to believe that knowledge pertinent to the approach being taken would emerge

after the planning and initial commencement of the research process were complete. I felt that by really listening to the voices of the participants, unforseen understandings would emerge and influence research direction. This is why the concept of possible additional filters was included in *The Phase and Flow Model* (Figure 1.2).

## 3.4.5 Focussing on the overall picture

A major consideration in the approach taken was how to best present the data and conclusions in what was a complex study utilising a wide range of data sources and types, and touching on fields relating to school culture, language and semiotics, capacity building, pedagogy, and leadership. With such complexity it was at all times important to keep in mind that it was the overall picture that must be portrayed (van Manen, 1997) rather than the micro-details of its many facets. In addition and in a similar vein to Wilson's (2002) phenomenological considerations I aimed to capture cognitive, relational, pedagogical and multifaceted representations of the lived experiences of school communities that utilised the contextually specific language-in-use which lay at the heart of the phenomenon under scrutiny and to ultimately portray them as a whole.

## 3.4.6 The distilling process

Once the main phenomenological question was articulated the sub-questions came into view. With these outlined and with the necessary approvals gained the data collection commenced. I decided to start collecting data from Sunny Fields State School, as I had already in my possession a vast amount of data from Forrester Hill. This data had been accumulated over an eight year period and I had also read and re-read the reflection journal that I had commenced in 2004 whilst a facilitator of the IDEAS process at Forrester Hill. Although not really 'complete' (as there were many months when I had entered nothing at all) it captured much of my initial and subsequent thinking. So to start with Sunny Fields gave me a whole new perspective on the phenomenon.

Figure 3.2 shows the way in which I organised the collection of the data and how data distillation occurred. It illustrates how data were viewed through the various filters of dialogic exchange, pedagogy and engagement, and visual manifestations, so

as to determine the essence of the contextually specific language-in-use. These filters facilitated the process of taking the described data (the depiction lens – Phase 1) and reducing it to essence (the reduction lens – Phase 2). Once reduced to 'Essence', the interpretations of this living knowledge (new knowledge) and their overall importance in these and possibly other school contexts (the interpretation lens – Phase 3) became clear. Phase 4 involved taking the new knowledge emergent from this research and applying it to the fields of educational practice and research methodology.

Each of the filters was used as a stage within the depiction (the thick description) phase of the analysis. However, the initial question, in its entirety, was the focus.
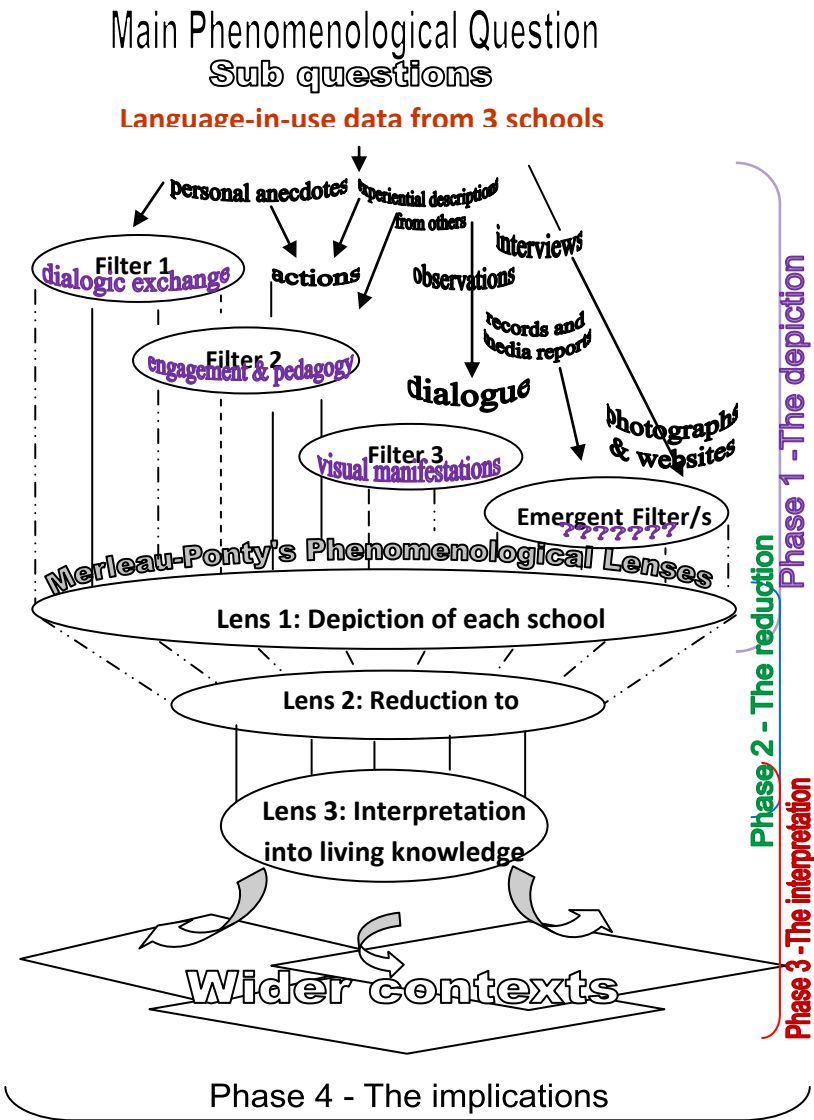


Figure 3.2 The collection and distilling process. The data from all schools were reduced to 'Essence' followed by the interpretation and then the implications of this new knowledge.

It is Figure 3.2 which illustrates the collection and distilling process and how the Main Phenomenological Question was never lost from sight. The filters and lenses utilised were essential to this filtering process.

## 3.4.7 The filters through which the data were viewed

The filters were a tool for viewing the data in order to gain a holistic view of the various forms of language-in-use and the themes emergent from these. The use of the *Dialogic Exchange* was the first filter to be applied in Phase 1 of the data interpretation process (Filter 1 in Figure 3.2). It acknowledged the emphasis that notable phenomenological researchers (Langeveld, 1984; Lingis, 1972; Moustakas, 1994; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 1997) placed on the more traditional forms of text such as spoken, written and transcribed texts.

The *Engagement and Pedagogy Filter* framed the second stage of analysis (Filter 2 in Figure 3.2) and focussed on identifying the thinking and acting processes within the school community that became manifested as classroom and whole school practice. Van Manen's emphasis on teaching, pedagogy, tact and engagement with children at their level of experience (van Manen, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 2000, 2003), combined with my own beliefs, saw the creation of this filter come into being.

The last stage in Phase 1 of the initial analysis utilised the *Visual Manifestations Filter* (Filter 3 in Figure 3.2) to reflect on how the images of each data site added insights to the data. This filter originated from understandings gained from a multiliteracies action research project undertaken within Forrester Hill State School (Anstey & Bull, 2005) and awareness of the power of images both verbal and visual to convey messages (Lester, 2006). The importance of this filter was supported by the work of phenomenologists (Langsdorf, Watson, & Bower, 1996; Lanigan, 1992; Mearleu-Ponty, 1962, 1964), linguists (Bahktin, 1981; Gee, 1996; Lankshear, 2003), and organisational analysts (Morgan, 1997; Owens & Steinhoff, 1989). "Works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man... that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience" (Dewey, 1934, p. 105). This filter included analysis of field notes and images captured photographically or linguistically at each data site.

The *Emergent Filter(s)* is the final filter depicted within Figure 3.2. This filter (or filters) was (were) left unidentified at the beginning of the analysis. As explained earlier, my initial understandings of the hermeneutic phenomenological process had prompted me to allow for the possibility that another filter or filters may emerge as the analysis of data unfolded. It was a possibility that could have easily been discarded if not required. Therefore, it was the use of the three defined filters which initially allowed me to view, interpret and reflect on our – the researcher and the participants – interpretations of the multiliterate texts that made up our experiences of the phenomenon.

Although this study was not a critical analysis in the 'Freireian' sense, there was still a fundamental need to understand the processes that led to the creation of what was being seen through these three filters, as:

> Never does an event, a fact, a deed, a gesture of rage or love, a poem, a painting, a song, a book, have only one reason behind it…And so I have always been more interested in understanding the process in and by which things come about than in the product itself. (Freire, 1992, p. 10)

I was interested not only in the past process of language creation but whether the process was continuing or not. Some processes are finite with a definite beginning and an end. My awareness of the socio-cultural nature of language-development led me to believe that the evolving nature of the language was in itself an indicator of the vitality of a school community.

If language is conceived holistically (as I perceive it to be) – as any vehicle that allows a message to be passed between one individual and 'others' while also facilitating co-construction of meaning – then words, movement, images, media presentations, symbols and so forth are representations of speech diversity which "spread wider and penetrate to ever deeper levels so long as a language is alive and still in the process of becoming" within school communities (Bakhtin, 1981, p. xix).

> *The emergent filter concept emerged as I immersed myself in the hermeneutic stance. I was not really sure whether it would be needed, or, if needed, then would only one be needed. If something did emerge then I was no doubt going to have to do some more reading and research in the area to really know whether it was (or they were) worthy of inclusion as an additional filter or filters. Basically, I just had to wait and see what the data were going to reveal.*

Evidence of the dynamic nature of language-in-use in the lived experiences framed within the schools involved in this research was therefore sought and formed part of the 'montagic' interpretations made.

Although the IDEAS project, activated by committed school personnel, had been the original guiding process for each of these schools – the 'umbrella' under which other processes sat, it was these 'other processes' that were not necessarily consistent across the three data sites. In order to understand these processes – which were the common drivers and which were contextually unique – it was necessary to look at the data through all three filters (and if it did emerge – the fourth or maybe even fifth filters) to thereby complete the first phase of interpretation before any additional phases could be undertaken.

### 3.4.8 Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological lenses or phases

For Merleau-Ponty (1962), the phenomenological method consisted of depiction, reduction to essence and interpretation which can be explained in the following manner: the depiction accounts for a human awareness of what is; the reduction seeks to find essence (a fundamental account of *how* the description has meaning); and, the interpretation gives concrete application of these findings (Lanigan, 1992). The method of extracting the essence from the lived experiences of the participants from the whole of a data set down to the elements that conveyed specific meaning and import in practical contexts is captured in *The Phases and Flow Model* (Figure 3.3).

## 3.5 An Explanation of "The Phases and Flow Model"

The Phases and Flow research model (Figure 3.3) illustrates the inter-connected nature of the filters, steps and phases within the process. It is important to remember that there is no precise cut off point or juncture between one phase and another, and yet to illustrate the process, it requires explanation in a somewhat sequential manner. The many overlaps and combined elements within the phases are explained as the need arises.
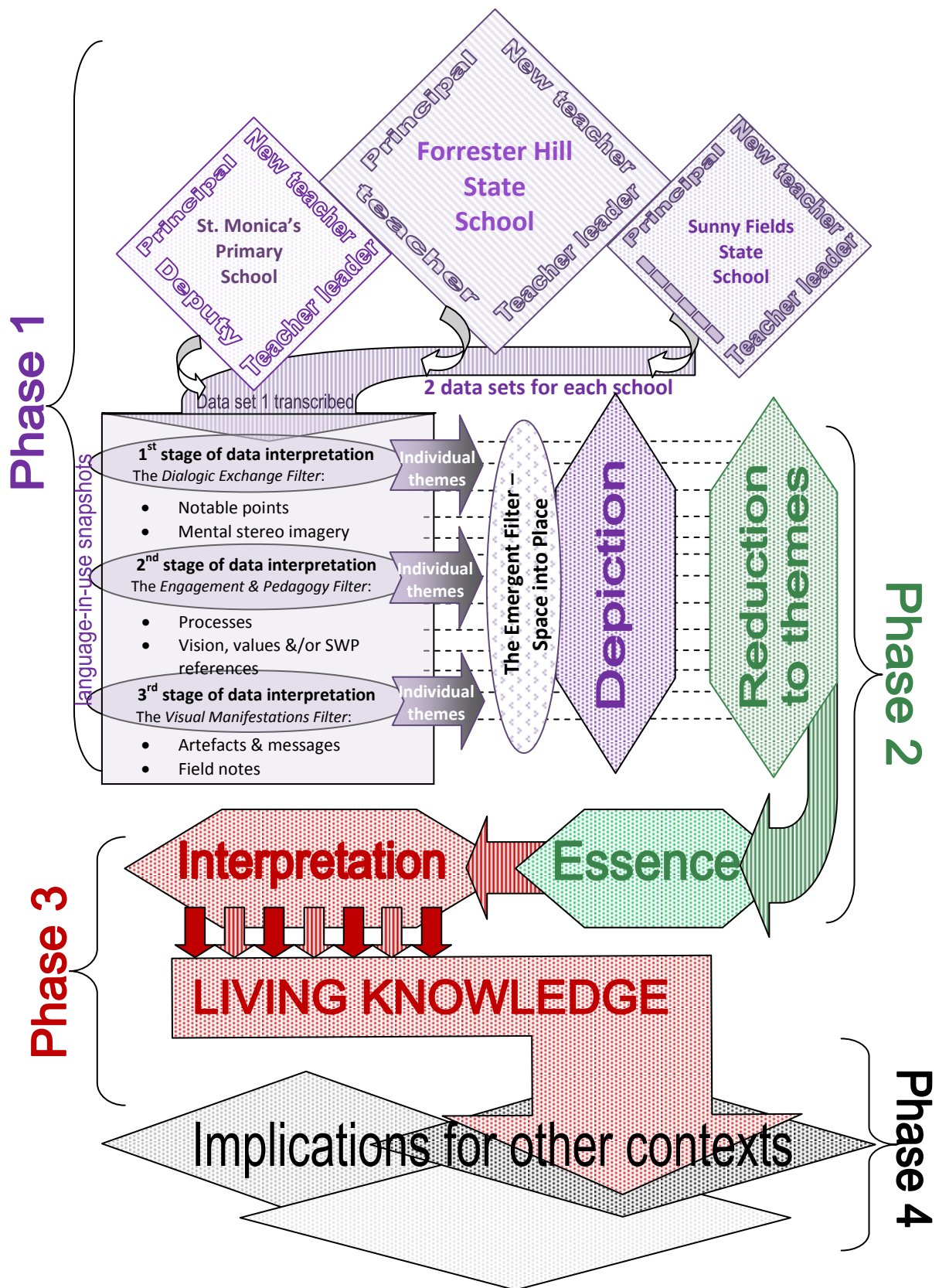
Figure 3.3 The Phases and Flow Model. This model is integral to the understanding of this research approach and can be folded out to be referred to throughout the chapters.

A simplified version of The Phases and Flow Model (Figure 3.3) was first introduced in Chapter 1 to orient the reader to the concepts of filters and phases, as well as, illustrate the unfolding nature of the research process. Within Chapter 3, Figure 3.3 is viewed as the central model and is positioned so that readers of this thesis can unfold the page on which the figure has been placed. This enables the Phases and Flow Model to be used as a guide to where the various components fit within the research process as a whole.

## 3.5.1 Phase 1: The depiction

Phase 1 involved all the components represented in Figure 3.3 and colour coded in purple. It involved the collection of the data (two data sets per school), the transcription of audio records, the viewing of all data through the three filters into individual themes and then these through the Emergent Filter (when and if it appeared).

The steps taken in Phase 1 were as follows:

**Step 1.** Reviewed data from past reflections

In May 2009, the two reflection journals that I had kept for a number of years (the first as a consequence of the multiteracies action research project of which I was a part, and the second as my records as IDEAS facilitator within my school) were considered in the light of the main research question. Sections relevant to the research were highlighted for later reference. Many of these form the reflection points that supplement the main research journey and are noted as italicised notes throughout this thesis.

**Step 2.** Data collection undertaken

Ethical clearance had been obtained from the University of Southern Queensland, the Sydney Catholic Diocese, and the Toowoomba Catholic Diocese, as well as from the principals from two local Education Queensland schools. During the later part of 2009, data were collected from a total of seven schools but the data from only three schools (selected because of the comprehensiveness of the final data sets) were used: Forrester Hill State School, St. Monica's Primary School and Sunny Fields State

School. (Throughout this thesis pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity when naming schools or individuals.) The data collection at Sunny Fields State School occurred during a six-month period from May to November in 2009. Data collection at St. Monica's occurred on a one-day visit in November, 2009. Data from Forrester Hill had been collated over an eight-year period due to my personal involvement as a staff member of the school. To verify and add further insights to my interpretations of what had occurred at Forrester Hill, I conducted interviews with staff in February of 2010. Data consistency was obtained by the questions that guided the interview process, the role positions of those interviewed and the types of multifaceted texts that were collected.

**Step 3.** <u>All recorded data were transcribed</u>

I chose to transcribe the data myself as I did not wish to lose any of the richness of meaning possible from interpreting early impressions of correlations across data sites. To maintain consistency throughout this investigation I worked with and documented each school's data in the following order: first, Sunny Fields; second, Forrester Hill; and third, St. Monica's.

**Step 4.** <u>The culminating depiction</u>

The depiction was to be the end result of viewing all the data through the filters of *Dialogic Exchange*, *Engagement and Pedagogy*, *Visual Manifestations* and any emergent filter/s.

- Filter 1: *The dialogic exchange filter* – notable points and mental stereo imagery descriptors were isolated and grouped according to themes.

- Filter 2: *The engagement and pedagogy filter* – notable points were analysed for their inherent processes (Halliday, 1973). References to vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy were highlighted to obtain insights into purposeful action and then grouped in themes.

- Filter 3: *The visual manifestations filter* – data other than the spoken word, mainly captured as artefacts and message forms such as newsletters, photographs and websites, were analysed for themes.

- Filter 4: *Any emergent filter/s* – Initially this filter was the unknown entity in the depiction to reduction process.

## 3.5.2 Phase 2: The Reduction Phase

Phase 2 represents the main section of the data analysis (colour coded in green within Figure 3.3) where the reduction to 'Essence' takes place. The Reduction Phase proved difficult to separate from the Depiction Phase or indeed from the subsequent phases. In order to make this vital phase comprehensible as possible it was divided into two parts. The detailed investigations within Phase 2 Part A are represented by Chapter 5, while Phase 2 Part B is captured in Chapter 6. A brief outline of each step follows;

**The Reduction Part A** – Identifying themes by steps (Chapter 5):

Step 1: School and role specific notable points (5.2)

Step 2: Role grouped themes (5.3)

Step 3: Linking themes into 'Narratives of Significance' (5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7)

Step 4: Reflecting with the plane of multifaceted texts (5.8)

Step 5: Shared themes from the schools (5.9)

During Part A of Phase 2, further 'Indicators of Essence' would emerge and be captured within reflection boxes throughout the chapter and then summarised at the end of Chapter 5.

**The Reduction Part B** – Finding essence by steps (Chapter 6):

Step 1: The reduction into holistic themes indicative of essence (6.1)

Step 2: Finding essence (6.2)

Step 3: Applying the *space into 'Place'* filtering process (6.3)

Step 4: Identifying essence (6.4)

### 3.5.3 Phase 3: Interpretation into living knowledge

Chapter 7 delves into the findings which emerged and draws on cultural understandings and how these were being utilised within each school's daily practices. The 'Essence' of a contextually specific language-in-use was to be examined in relation to what this meant for both individuals and the collective within the schools. This phase is colour coded red within Figure 3.3 and refers to the links that can be made between the research findings and their significance, not only within the participating schools but in educational contexts generally.

### 3.5.4 Phase 4: The implications of the findings

Explored within the concluding chapter, and indicated by the black section within Figure 3.3, are the implications of the new knowledge emergent from this research. The implications vary in scope but primarily relate to possible applications of the research findings; deeper understandings related to the attributes of the research approach taken; and the contributions made by this thesis to both education and research communities.

## 3.6 The Research Strategy: Depicting 'Snapshots'

In many ways the basic data-collection strategy used throughout this study was akin to that of the qualitative case study as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Noor (2008) and Yin (1993). Fieldwork was carried out and data collected at each data site in a variety of ways. Semi-structured in-depth interviews (Noor, 2008) were chosen for their flexible nature.  All interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription and interpretation. While in the field (school visits) a participant-observer stance was taken as environmental factors were noted and as I engaged in the give and take of the co-creation of meaning.

Basically, a case study approach explores in detail, over an extended time period, many subsets of understandings related to a specific case under exploration, whether that case be a person, a group or an event (Gerring, 2005). A case study approach could have been applied to the Forrester Hill and Sunny Fields contexts due to the longer term nature of my involvement in these schools. However, I spent only one

day at St. Monica's as this was all that was required to clarify the interpretations arising from the current research. Yin (1993) describes three types of case study research: explanatory, descriptive and exploratory and this study proved to be related to a little of each.

Thus the case study approach did not seem to entirely cover the overall intent of this inquiry. Partly this was because not all school stories were to be collected over a significant period of time, as I was interested in a phenomenon rather than a particular event. Another factor was that it was not only me, as the researcher, that would be examining the data, but the participants as well; therefore, what was required was a way of blending ideas and interpretations together.

My approach was made up of an amalgamation of understandings related to naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2001), personal narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), historical inquiry (Olden-Jørgensen, 1998; Thurén, 1997) and a collaborative-interpretative approach (Heron, 1996; Reason, 1995). I took the concept of a 'Snapshots' approach and adapted it to meet my need. Metaphorically speaking, many different 'Snapshots' were taken at each school and when brought together they formed the basis of each school montage and the final depiction.

The term 'Snapshots' for research purposes had previously been used in a number of ways. Knobel (Goodson, Knobel, Lankshear, & Marshall Mangan, 2002) used the term snapshot as part of a specific research approach taken in order to investigate mulitiliteracies practices. Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson and Hann (2002) used the term snapshot to portray themed insights into teacher leadership practices in schools. My understanding of the term differs considerably to that of Knobel who used the concept of a snapshot to indicate the recording of data from within a moment in time (a time specific snapshot). Crowther et al (2002) used it to describe a type of mini case study around a particular focus theme. My view of a snapshot is more aligned to the second example given. I view a 'Snapshot' as capturing interpretations related to one basic image, conceptual understanding, or theme. A theme specific snapshot can be captured in a moment within time, but it may also be used to portray a cross-section of time related materials, all pertaining to the one theme or concept.

## 3.7 Data Collection

To collect data from each school it was necessary to be physically present at each site. I had taught at Forrester Hill State School context for many years. Sunny Fields State School was easily accessible being a half an hour's drive away from my place of residence – therefore I was able to spend whole and part days at the site. In total, eight visits were undertaken: three whole days; two half days; one parent evening meeting; one student work display evening; and, one afternoon after school towards the end of the data collection stage to interview participants more formally and jointly clarify understandings.

The visit to St. Monica's Primary School involved one full day of interviews (in the morning) and classroom observations (in the afternoon). The depth and breadth of data from Sunny Fields and Forrester Hill were vast, so St. Monica's data were used to gain insights into the phenomenon as it existed in a school from a different Australian state and within a different system context – a New South Wales Catholic Education context compared to the local Education Queensland one. The data obtained from this visit added trustworthiness to the findings, helped to clarify key themes and 'Indicators of Essence', and strengthened the overall significance of the interpretations.

The following list is a guide to the main types of data collected:

- Personal anecdotes – the experiential recount
- Interviews used to:
  - gather, explore and critically reflect on experiential narrative material
  - develop conversational relationships
- Idiomatic phrases and metaphor – how they are used and what they reveal
- Field observation notes by researcher
- Photography and school website exploration as a source of images of 'lived experience'

Other forms of data were incorporated as they emerged for "the experience of something that appears ineffable within the context of one type of discourse may be

expressible by means of another" (van Manen, 1997, p. 113). Subsequently the following were added:

- Symbols – that either I or others interpreted as being significant to each school community (these were merged to some extent with the art),

- The layout of physical spaces – the ways in which structural spaces were used i.e. seating arrangements and displays

How the data would be collected, from whom and from where they would be collected, was mapped out at the commencement of the research and the timelines around the collection process were documented as captured in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1 Framework for data collection**

| Data Sources (collected 2009) | Multifaceted Texts | Phenomenol-ogical interest | Participant Role | Researcher Role |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Key written records** | chronological IDEAS records | differing data type | reflect on | receptive to others reflection |
| **Visual Representations** | photos, posters, charts school signs art works | source images of 'lived experience' | researcher-participants to contribute meaning | capture external viewpoint – before pre-coloured by insights |
| **Texts other than visual** | recollections pamphlets newsletters PowerPoints websites | presence of idiomatic phrases & metaphor | researcher-participants to contribute meaning | capture external viewpoint – pre-coloured by insights |
| **Dialogic Exchange** | interviews incidental exchanges | key questions idiomatic phrases & metaphor themes identified | reflection cross checking of meaning & intent | reflection use filters and lenses |
| **Cognitive enaction** | ah-ha moments changed language use or/and behaviour | locating the themes SWP & vision in action | reflection use filters and lenses | reflection use filters and lenses |
| **Meetings** | staff P&C (none at St. Monica's) | interactions & reactions – words in frequent use – | involved regularly Forrester Hill & Sunny Fields | many at Forrester Hill six at Sunny Fields |
| **Field Insights** | classroom practice conversation observation | first impressions environment relationships feelings at site | | being perceptive suspend bias seek essence – open & mindful |
| **Research Diary** | reflection Diary On the spot notes | experiential anecdotes | | reflections and directions |

## 3.7.1 The variables and constants

Within the data sets a number of variables came into play. Schools differed in regards to the following:

1.  Differing education systems – Two schools were in a State Education System in Queensland (Australia), while one was from the Catholic Education System in New South Wales (Australia).

2.  Size variations – A range of school sizes was included: a small rural school (68 students); a medium sized metropolitan school (350); and a large regional school (480).

3.  My prior knowledge of each school varied – My prior involvement with each school varied. I had taught in the large regional school for over ten years and had been a facilitator of the IDEAS process during the majority of that time. The small rural school was one where I had met both the Principal, one of the teachers, and a teacher-aide from the school at a number of IDEAS cluster meetings (perhaps three times in total). The third school and its personnel were not directly known to me.

4.  Variable lengths of involvement with the IDEAS process – Forrester Hill had been involved with the process for eight years, the small rural school for over three years and the medium sized metropolitan school for close to two and a half years.

5.  Variable leadership and staff stability – Forrester Hill had undergone a complete change of leadership and many changes in staff within its eight year involvement with IDEAS. The small rural school had maintained the same staff and gained one teacher with some prior knowledge of the school. The Principal at St. Monica's had left due to ill health and the Assistant Principal (a key IDEAS facilitator) had become the Principal with an acting Assistant Principal coming into the school who was also committed to supporting the process. There had been some minor changes of staff.

Each of the schools possessed the following similarities. They had:

1.  Completed the whole school improvement process – Each school had completed all stages of the formalised IDEAS project and believed that it

had made a significant difference to their school communities. They possessed a strong school vision, a set of clearly defined community values and a widely accepted schoolwide pedagogical framework.

2. <u>Received two layers of external support</u> – All three had received external support throughout the process both from the University of Southern Queensland's IDEAS team and from a system representative within their educational context.

3. <u>Catered for basically the same age group of students</u> - All schools catered for students in the Primary years from age 5 to approximately 11 or 12. This covered the years of preparatory school through to moving on to secondary school. Being situated in New South Wales the Catholic Education school only went to Year 6 while the two Queensland schools went up to Year 7.

4. <u>Common participant understandings</u> - The individuals participating in the study had been given a clear understanding as to what the current research project involved and were willing to be researcher/participants in this creative endeavour.

## 3.7.2 Possible limitations

It is important to note that I was aware that my long term understanding of the IDEAS process could be seen as both a benefit and a limitation. Of benefit was my understanding of how the process unfolds and my sound knowledge of its key principles, stages and terminology constructs, which reduced the need to ask for clarification of IDEAS specific aspects that arose within the interview process. However, this attribute could have proved detrimental to my overall understanding if I had not been consciously and continually attempting to guard against the preconceptions that I might have brought into play. It was tempting to see other journeys as being similar to my own, however, two things worked well in order to minimise this possibility. Firstly, the variables reduced the sense of being involved in 'their' story as the differences made each school context quite unique. Secondly, as I interpreted what was said and what was seen, I continually cross checked these interpretations with participants to ensure that interpretations were as close as possible to their original intent. The data site participants' reflections became crucial

to ensuring the validity of the knowledge found. The comparison of insights and themes across campuses was also used to clarify, add depth and breadth, and if necessary, to question elements of the picture that had been created in my mind from my own lived experience at Forrester Hill.

## 3.7.3 Interviews and questions

The qualitative interviews conducted were conversational, semi-structured by a set of interview questions which were kept in mind but not adhered to strictly. They were asked in no particular order and were flexible enough to allow conversations to go off on tangents that could add insights and/or build relationships with the interviewee. The guiding questions were constructed to correspond to the filters and were as follows:

- What evidence is there to suggest that the current dialogue within your school reflects a greater understanding by teachers of how to meet the educational needs of their students both now and possibly in the future? (the *Dialogic Exchange Filter*)

- How are creativity and human initiative evident to others and how are they represented in the texts of your school? (the *Visual Manifestations Filter*)

- In what ways does mediation take place when needed and how does this resonate with the language-in-use within your school? (the *Dialogic Exchange Filter*)

- What specific instances (lived experiences) can your recall that heightened social, emotional or/ and cognitive awareness and engagement within your professional community? (the *Engagement and Pedagogy Filter*)

- Describe what you would consider as a 'unique' way (or ways) in which your 'core business' as teachers is explored, clarified, fortified and/or enhanced within your school? (the *Engagement and Pedagogy Filter*)

- What value, if any, is there in using a multimodal approach (combining images, media and text) to clarifying deep meaning within your school context? (the *Visual Manifestations Filter*)

Due to insights gained, an additional question was formulated soon after the first interview had taken place with the Principal from Sunny Fields State School. It became worded as:

- In your own words describe where understanding takes place in your school? (the *Emergent Filter*)

With the direction of the interview guided by these questions it could be said that a general interview approach was taken (Valenzuela & Shrivastava, 2008). The intent of these interviews aligned with Kvale's (1996) guide to the qualitative research interview, in that each interview sought to uncover both facts and meanings as it was the stories behind the experiences that gave real meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, 2000). There was also a conscious effort made by the interviewer to develop the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Abawi, 2011; Ellingson, 1998; Erwee & Conway, 2006; Fine, 1992; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001).

The depth of the conversations that were generated, and the honesty and willingness by participants to question assumptions and interpretations made throughout the dialogic exchanges, gave data internal validity, as the findings mapped in detail the phenomenon according to those sharing their lived experiences in each setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 186). Particular attention was paid to noting when participants appeared to emphasise the importance of an utterance by gesture or intonation – I have called these moments 'notable points'. It was these "features of the discourse that make particular readings or reactions possible, plausible and understandable" (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 92) which acted as pointers in my quest for the 'Essence' of each lived experience. Some notable points were initial theme indicators that required further analysis while others stood out as 'ah-ha moments' right from the beginning. I thought of these moments as the silences within the text as they were the moments when reflection turned inward and found resonance with deeper meaning. These became the first 'Indicators of Essence' and therefore the first to be titled as 'Indicators of Essence' and then numbered.

### 3.7.4 Other forms of data collection

Each school generously gave me access to internal records related to the IDEAS process and welcomed the taking of photographs and field notes in addition to the

digital audio recordings. I did not take photographs of people but of the artefacts and displays that abounded. I was allowed access to digital records of meetings, professional development procedures, and photographs of the outcomes captured on paper from brainstorming and work sessions both past and present. The field notes taken on site were related to initial impressions and the general 'feel' of each school, as well as, observed relationships and environmental factors. The field notes were valuable points of reflection and complemented the learning log I had started many years earlier. It is only by reflecting on experience that we truly learn from experience (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Eby, Herrell, & Jordan, 2006; Fetherstone, 2006).

## 3.8 Working with the Data

There are always issues with taking words presented in one form, in this case spoken, and presenting them in another, in this case written (Kvale, 1996). Somehow the words used become more concrete in their meaning and therefore less flexible in their intent. They become de-contextualised to some degree and overtones of participant presence such as facial expressions and gestures are entirely lost (Powney & Watts, 1987). This limitation was minimised by cross-checking understandings with participants, adding interjections from my own reflection journal and by using the montagic approach to capturing lived experience. I also consciously returned to the Main Research Question add regular intervals, thereby stitching, and sometimes re-stitching fragments into the fabric of the research as whole.

### 3.8.1 Transcribing the data

All interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded and then transcribed. I chose to transcribe the recordings myself so as to not lose the nuances of voice, and the silences between talk, that could be significant to meaning. I did not record body language or the positioning of respondents to each other and the environment but where I deemed these significant captured these within my field note observations, or recalled them as conversations were replayed. Inevitably some voices dropped off at the end of sentences or there were interruptions to the conversation that were

recorded and which overrode the speaker's words. However, in general, these were minimal and the quality of the recordings was clear and easy to decipher particularly in the recordings from Forrester Hill and St. Monica's.

Sunny Fields' recordings were more complex due to the nature of the school itself and the strong parallel leadership (Andrews & Crowther, 2002) within the school that was evident at all times. No matter where an interview was conducted or a conversation was initiated (or whose voice was primarily meant to be heard) several voices would be interjecting and overlapping the main conversational thread. Due to the frequency of visits and the relationship that developed between researcher and participants this added richness and authenticity to the transcriptions, as I was familiar with the multi-voiced nature of the respondents' responses. At times the layers of what was said were just echoes of agreement.

At first, I transcribed every word heard clearly on the recordings but upon re-reading the transcripts I then deleted irrelevant words or interjections that interrupted the flow of meaning and therefore its integrity. I acknowledge that it could be construed that I was interpreting the recordings in my own manner but I believe this to be a part of the hermeneutic process. I believed that the 'lived experience' and sense of 'being' presented to me should not have been trivialised by incidental interjections not relevant to the conversation at hand. I also understood that the manner of such interjections was indicative of a sense of equality, acceptance and openness within this school community and I captured this cultural insight within the field notes instead.

## 3.8.2 The analysis/interpretation of the data

Shortly after commencing the process of data analysis the use of the word analysis became used less frequently and instead interpretation took its place. As the filters and lenses were applied to the data, the strength of the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective came into play. The word analysis is clinical by nature, as it suggests the dissecting of a topic into smaller components. However, interpretation is organic and naturalistic by nature and far better suited to the understandings of lived experience which were emerging and are captured in Chapter

6. The hermeneutic paradigm is one which "interprets the texts of life" (van Manen, 1997, p. 4) so interpretation, and not a more traditional form of analysis, was often used as the investigation unfolded.

## 3.9 Data Trustworthiness

The approach taken replicated a number of the criteria put forward by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for research trustworthiness including: data triangulation, prolonged engagement, persistent observation, referential adequacy, member checks, reflexivity and thick description. My application of these criteria to this research project is explored in more detail.

Data triangulation refers to the collection of data from multiple sources. Patton (1999) and Denzin (1978) saw triangulation of data being possible in three contexts; data collected at different points of time, data taken from 'in house' as well as from materials in the public arena, and data collected from a variety of viewpoints. Table 3.2. captures the ways in which data triangulation was obtained.

**Table 3.2 Triangulation of data**

| Data site | Over time | In-house & public | Varied viewpoints |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sunny Fields** | personal contact - May Nov 2009 written records 2006-2009 | records/photos of meetings & workshops newsletters & website | Principal teacher leader new teacher |
| **Forrester Hill** | personal experience - 8 year period 2003-2010 school records over same | records/photos of meetings & workshops newsletters & website personal anecdotes | Principal new teacher teacher leader personal anecdotes |
| **St. Monica's** | 1 full-day visit Dec 2009 records over a 2 ½ -3 year period 2007-2009 | records/photos of meetings & workshops newsletters & website | Principal Assistant Principal teacher leader new teacher |

Prolonged engagement refers to being within the field of research for an extended period of time so as to deeply understand the culture and the phenomenon of interest. My own prolonged involvement as a member of the Forrester Hill staff throughout the IDEAS process prompted this research due to the phenomenon that had emerged as part of the journey towards school improvement.

Persistent observation "provides scope, persistent observation provides depth" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). This current research project was commenced due to initial casual observation in the workplace which then progressed to determined persistent observation about the contextually specific language-in-use that was in daily use within the Forrester Hill school community.

Member checks were undertaken by participants in the research as the research unfolded. The meanings uncovered by the interview processes and dialogic exchanges were verified by checking and cross checking of understandings between all parties involved. As the interviewer I rephrased understandings gleaned and asked for either affirmation or clarification during and after each exchange unfolded. The acceptance by all concerned, that they were co-creators of meaning, ensured that the data reflected participant intent and empowered the participants in the process:

> *Having you here has been great  - I am studying at present and reflecting together like this really helps me to see clearly the journey we've been on. It is empowering to look back and see the distance travelled.* (Principal St. Monica's)

Morse (1994) and Angen (2000) would see that such an approach reduces data validity as they believe there is no objective truth or reality against which to compare. However, an interpretive study such as this aims to capture lived experience through the eyes of participants – therefore this approach confirms the data rather than invalidates it.

Reflexivity refers to a documented process of knowledge construction by the researcher throughout the investigation process. Malterud (2001) identifies that "a researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation" as well as the methods, the findings, and "the framing and communication of conclusions" (pp. 483-484). He goes onto say that "preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them" (p. 484). The reflection journals I had commenced in 2004 were added to through the inclusion of field notes, general observations and research process thinking throughout this investigation. Snippets of these records (evidenced as the

framed italicised segments) have been used consistently throughout the chapter to add light on the reflective thinking that occurred. These reflections were generally related to the direction that the research needed to take, or was being taken, and the strength of the unfolding hermeneutic nature of the process itself.

<u>Thick description</u> refers to detailed accounts of field experiences that reveal cultural and environmental factors that magnify the meaning of the data by placing them within context. The term was first coined by Ryle (1949) but then developed by Geertz (1973) in his seminal work *The Interpretation of Cultures*, as an ethnographical description for connecting both researcher and reader to meaning in context. Although used from an anthropologist's perspective, Geertz's thick description is indicative of what it means to capture a deep sense of culture from a description. "The informal logic of actual life…whatever, or wherever, symbol systems 'in their own terms' may be, we gain empirical access to them by inspecting events, not by arranging abstracted entities into unified patterns" (Geertz, 1973, p. 17). Geertz goes on to say that thick description "grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions" (p. 25). The thick description within this thesis is one constructed from lived experience, mental stereo imaging, visual manifestations of meaning, field notes, impressions, feelings and cultural awarenesses woven together to create the essence of the phenomenon. It is the means by which *geist* (Dilthey, 1976) is portrayed. The thick descriptions lead to the creation of school montages and together these equate to Phase 1 or the Merleau-Ponty's lens of 'depiction'.

## 3.10 Conclusion

This methodology was devised to blend a number of paradigms and perspectives together, primarily socio-constructivist and interpretive paradigms with Van Manen and Merleau-Ponty's approaches to hermeneutic phenomenology and the portraying of lived experiences. There were four phases taken within this interpretative process, and in order to explore in depth the phenomenon of how school personnel identified with and employed a contextually created language-in-use within their 'life-worlds', a number of filters and lenses were devised and utilised within these phases.

The filters of *dialogic exchange*, *engagement and pedagogy* and *visual manifestations*, (and later the *space into 'Place'* filter) were related to the most obvious attributes of the meaning making system encompassing all school experiences in its most holistic sense. Merleau-Ponty's lenses of depiction, reduction and interpretation sought to highlight the essence of these experiences in order to ascertain their significance in other contexts.

The filters and lenses (the phases) were not to be used as standalone views or juncture points within the research process but were to be interlinked and overlapped, thereby allowing the filters, and then the lenses, to add meaning to other steps within the research process. It was to be a recursive process of investigation, always returning to the main question. This meant that as new understandings emerged, I might need to return to a past section within the research journey, in order to clarify or add depth to what was discovered.

Findings from this investigation were portrayed in a consistent order – first Sunny Fields, then Forrester Hill, followed by St. Monica's. Where variances occurred they occurred due to intent. The reasons pertaining to the order of presentation are as follows:

- Sunny Fields was not my own school therefore I had a more objective view of the data. This was beneficial in acquiring critical insights unrelated to my own experiences.

- The wealth of data acquired from Sunny Fields over a six-month period, led well into examination of the Forrester Hill data and made it easier to see significant connections as they emerged.

- Connections and reflections from Sunny Fields and Forrester Hill were then juxtaposed against those collected from St. Monica's which was a school from a different state and system from the other two sites. This added clarity and validated interpretations being made.

Adherence to a specific order proved a useful tool in the portrayal of both the data and the emergent findings as did the colour coding of each school. Sunny Fields was represented by gold (the golden fields and sun-ripening produce), Forrest Hill by purple (the flowers of the Jacaranda tree) and St. Monica's by blue (the sky towards which a KITE would fly). These helped to reinforce in my mind the contextually specific nature of the data. This added another facet to those made by the consistent use of contextually specific colour, metaphor and imagery.

# CHAPTER 4 : THE DEPICTION

Within the methodology it was explained that there were four phases undertaken to reduce the breadth of the school data down to the 'Essence' of the contextually specific language-in-use under investigation. These were the phases of depiction, reduction to essence, interpretation and implications for other contexts.

Chapter 4, the Depiction Phase, commences with a series of initial impressions recorded as brief 'Snapshots' into the background of each of the three schools, followed by exploration of the writing approach and the essence of my role as both participant and researcher. As has been depicted in Figure 3.3 each school's data were viewed through the use of the first three filters of *Dialogic Exchange*, *Engagement and Pedagogy*, and *Visual Manifestations* to capture what made each school's experiences unique. Before the next phase (the reduction) commenced the understandings resulting from the Depiction Phase were re-examined using any emergent filter/s that appeared.

According to Lanigan (1992), depiction is "an account of human awareness of what is" (p. 17). To me this means a holistic amalgamation of description, insight, perception, contextual relevance and placement, combined with specific characteristics of place, time, and the lived experiences of the characters as they relate to the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the intent of the depiction process was closely aligned to that of Ryle's (1949) thick description, as I sought to explain the difference between the observed and the experienced. The thick descriptions that resulted from this inquiry were enriched by insights into the relationships, the dynamics, the similarities, the differences and the ways of working that were evident within each of the data sites. Geertz (1973) developed Ryle's concept of thick description into a means of describing human behaviour within the context of when it occurs, thus endeavouring to make the meaning behind the behaviour understandable to outsiders with no knowledge of either the people or the context. It was with this understanding of the correlation between thick description and depiction that this analysis was commenced.

# 4.1 School 'Snapshots'

The first step to be taken within the Depiction Phase was to capture a basic picture or 'Snapshot' of each of the schools involved in the research. I used 'Snapshots' to portray a broad sweep of insights related to a theme, such as relationships; impressions; school backgrounds; significant events; or the perceived impacts of various actions. Some elements of the created 'Snapshots' are similar across all three schools and others are specific to their context. As the analysis of the data unfolded numerous snapshots relating to specific themes were captured. Shared theme 'Snapshots' were then used to create *'Montages of Meaning'* which add more complex insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

## 4.1.1 Initial impressions: A Sunny Fields 'Snapshot'



Sunny Fields State School is a picturesque small school situated amongst highly productive farm land, in fertile Peakview Valley. It is a well maintained, well resourced school surrounded by hills.

Sunny Fields is set in beautiful grounds adorned with striking bottle trees and wrapped around by a local creek. When this research commenced in 2009, there were 69 students enrolled in the school. Year levels offered were Prep to Year 7 in three coeducational multi-age classes.

Traditionally the student population had been drawn from largely rural backgrounds, including agricultural production and associated industries, however, in more recent years a number of students from the nearby town (which is quite large) have joined the school. Sunny Fields has a long proud history with several generations of families attending the school over its 100 year existence.

The Sunny Fields IDEAS journey commenced in 2006. At that time relationships between the school and its community were strained. Soon after starting the process student numbers within the school dropped and the school lost one teacher. This was a difficult time for staff and the need to align practice and shared understandings of pedagogy became essential for the two remaining teachers – including the Principal who is a teaching-principal. As numbers rose again, the teacher who had left the school was able to return and she noted that significant changes that had occurred in her absence, including the development of the school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy. The school's vision, 'Growing beautiful futures in the valley of opportunities', and school values are linked strongly to the concept of growth. The language of an agricultural community is embedded into the fabric of school life which can be evidenced in this extract from the school's website:

> Our school provides a wonderful family friendly atmosphere where every child is recognised and treated as an individual. Enrolment … is your child's 'growth to a beautiful future' and you can be reassured that you have made a 'bloomin' fine choice' for your child's education…there is a "valley of opportunities'" whether in the classroom, the sporting field or in an artistic endeavour for your child…Students learn in an environment that is firmly grounded in community values… now known as B.U.D.S.

## 4.1.2 Initial impressions: A Forrester Hill 'Snapshot'
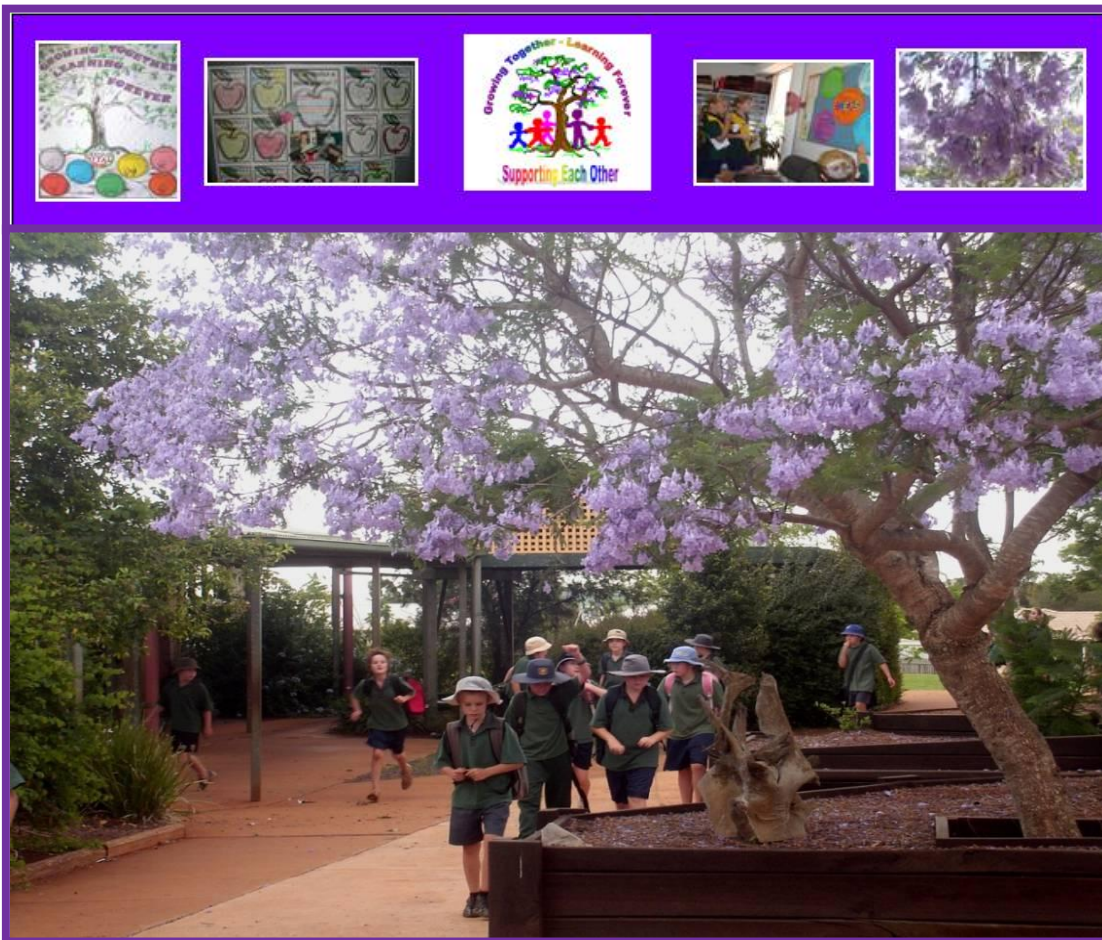


Forrester Hill State School is a relatively young state primary school (established in 1995) of around 500 students situated on the outskirts of a large regional city in Queensland.



The school campus backs onto natural bushland and the grounds are beautifully landscaped. The many Jacaranda trees planted within the grounds provided the inspiration for the school's vision *Growing Together – Learning Forever* and its schoolwide pedagogical framework (SWP) – Growing Together, Learning Forever,

Supporting Each Other – which are closely linked to the metaphor of a tree. The schoolwide pedagogy aims to address the social, emotional and cognitive needs of the school community. Each part of the tree is dependent on the other. The roots represent the *Supporting Each Other* plank of the SWP and demonstrate shared values and beliefs. The trunk represents the *Growing Together* plank, as the building of relationships is what supports the outcomes that the world sees. The outcomes, both academic and social are the leaves, PODS and flowers of *Learning Forever*.

Due to the opening of a new housing estate, the student population at Forrester Hill had grown rapidly from 120 students in 1997 to 440 students by 2001 and then steadied to its current population of around 500 at the time of data collection. Its socio-economic profile depicts a complex mix of affluence and poverty with some families living on prestigious acreage and others living in government housing. Approximately 60 of the students currently enrolled are supported by a Special Education Unit based at the school.

A few years after the school was established, the inaugural principal retired and it was 18 months before a substantive principal was appointed. Due to leadership uncertainty and escalating behaviour issues, staff relationships were strained and certain factions had gained considerable control over school direction. Even with the new leadership in place relationships within the school remained strained. The incoming principal committed the school to the IDEAS process in 2003, as a means of reinvigorating the school and reuniting the school under one vision and purpose. Initially my role within the IDEAS process was as 'just one of the teachers' involved in staff meeting discussions. However, one year after the IDEAS process commenced, I became a member of the IDEAS School Management Team (ISMT). Not long after joining the ISMT I took on the role of one of the two main IDEAS facilitators within the school and learnt first-hand what the IDEAS concept of parallel leadership meant.

Through combining personal reflections and conversations with colleagues, I portray the depth of the 'lived experiences' that staff at Forrester Hill Primary recall in relation to the evolution of the current language and culture. Adding substance and colour to this narrative are verbal and visual images connected to the evolution of the unique 'language-in-use' which continues to evolve within the school.

This extract, taken from the school's current website, is indicative of the sense of extended community and shared commitment to the school's vision and pedagogy:

> *Our Jacaranda Tree is the metaphor for the sense of purpose we feel …as we develop a root system embedded strongly in values education, a solid trunk built on celebrating difference in learning styles, cultures and backgrounds and producing flowers, seeds and leaves representing achievements for all to see in social skills displayed and through academic and cultural achievements…The staff, students and parents … are proud of our wonderful school and visitors are always welcome.*

### 4.1.3 Initial impressions: A St. Monica's 'Snapshot'
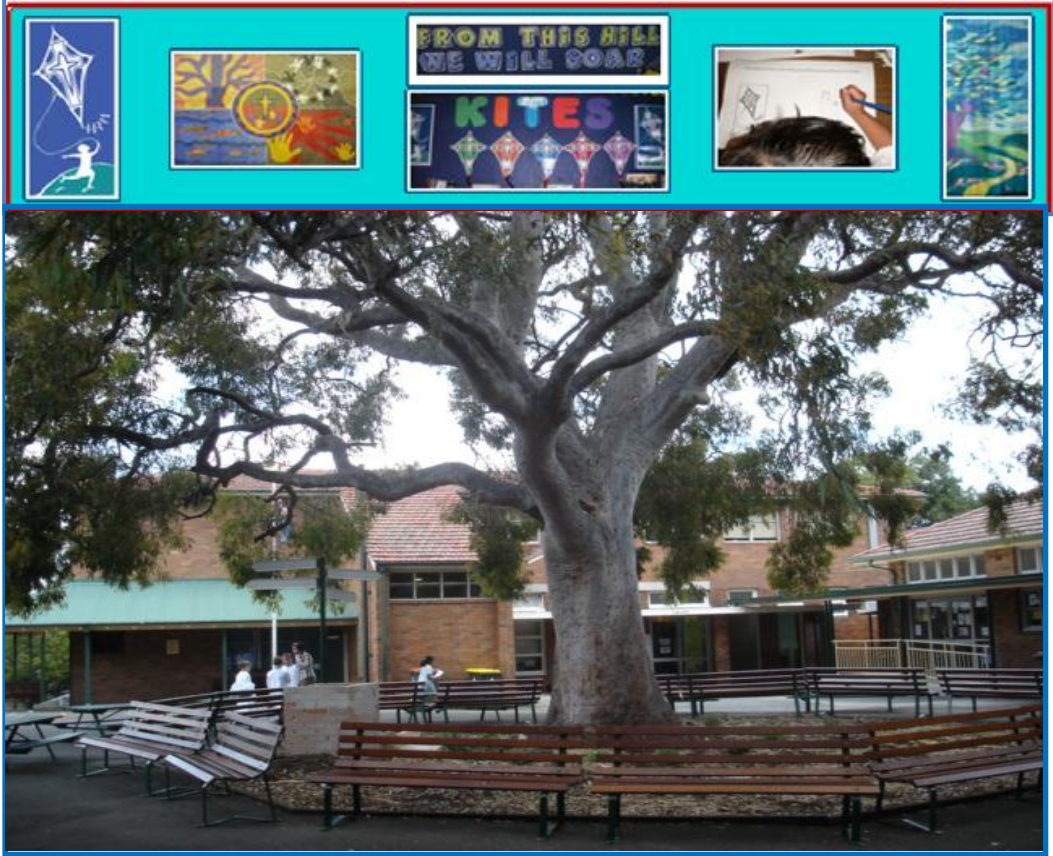
St. Monica's is a Catholic Primary school offering education for girls and boys from Prep[1] to Year 6. First established in 1922, the school moved premises to its current location in 1942 as student numbers continued to grow.
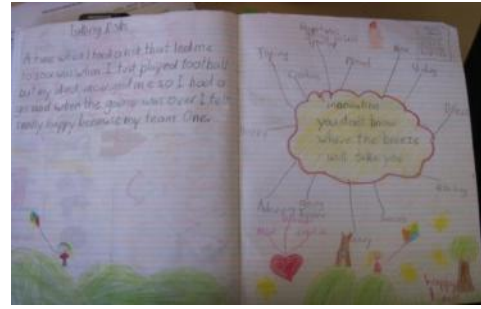
St. Monica's serves the community of an outer Sydney suburb and in 2009 the school had a population of 313 children from widely different backgrounds and cultures. Currently approximately 78% of families originate from a country other than Australia. There is a complex ethnic mix within the school community as students come from 35 different countries. In the year 2000, a building project enabled extensive renovations of existing facilities and the construction of a multi-purpose building was the first updating of facilities to have occurred for some time.

According to the current principal, relationships between the school and its community have always been sound. The school's vision, *From this hill we will soar,* has strong meaning for the school community as the words are connected to the words of one of the last Mercy sister principals to lead St. Monica's, who in her leaving speech said "from this hill here we have a vision of the future".

The words, therefore, have links to the school community's strong Catholic heritage and commitment to the Catholic faith. The school's schoolwide pedagogical framework is known as the KITES framework: **K**nowledge, **I**nnovation, **T**aking Risks, **E**mpowerment, (and) **S**uccess. The sense of commitment as a school community is, I feel, well captured in this excerpt from the school's website:

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[1] The preparatory year of schooling in Queensland is called Prep. In order to align with the two Queensland schools within this research this nomenclature is used throughout this thesis to describe the educational year level before Year 1. In New South Wales, where St. Monica's is situated, this year is called Kindergarten.

*Teachers and students have embraced our 'Vision for Learning' statement, the language of which is actively used daily between teachers and students within learning. This shared understanding guides the whole school community to be able to soar, reach our potential and to be successful as learners of the twenty-first century.*

### 4.1.4 The initial 'Snapshot' summary

These initial 'Snapshots' give some indication of the environmental context of each school and how some specific components of the language-in-use hold significant meaning for each school community. Each school's vision is strongly embedded in 'their' language through connection to some kind of community significant 'rich-metaphor'; a Jacaranda tree, buds (indicating growth), or the image of a kite. The concept of how 'rich-metaphors' can enrich school community practice will be explored as part of the data interpretation in Chapter 5, where the depth and clarity of shared lived experience with this form of 'mental stereo imaging' creates specific data site 'Montages of Meaning'.

## 4.2 The Writing Approach

Throughout this thesis I have primarily written in first person. The interpretative nature of hermeneutic phenomenological research lends itself to a very personal view of the world as it dwells in the lived experiences of its participants. As both a participant and the researcher in this inquiry, I had little option but to use this personalised writing perspective. By doing so I aimed to paint a whole view of the phenomenon by portraying a creative re-enactment of the lived experiences of both myself and others. By expressing my personal interpretations in the form of written and visual texts, the language I used would be echoing the language-in-use within these schools, at least to some degree, because

> it follows that even solitary thought does not cease using the language which supports it, rescues it from the transitory, and throws it back again. Cassirer said that thought was the "shuttlecock" of language. It also follows that perhaps, taken piece by piece, language does not yet contain

> its meaning, that all communication supposes in the listener a creative re-enactment of what is heard (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 8).

My thinking within this Depiction Phase was deflected in a number of directions by the responses of others. My understanding of where to search more deeply for insights, or which interpretive pathway to follow, emerged in an unplanned manner, influenced by a receptiveness to others' insights and their interpretations of what should be deemed significant. It was a semi-planned evolving, unfolding process rather than a fixed one.

As described in the previous chapter, the primary methods of data collection were via recorded interviews combined with field note observations and photographic evidence collected at each of the data sites, added to my own reflections and snippets from my reflection journal started in 2004. I aimed to create 'Snapshots' of each site and to piece together a montage of images, and impressions that when placed in juxtaposition with each other would assist in the interpretation of the data as I sought for the 'essence' of the unique metaphorical and pedagogical language-in-use within each site. All schools have a language-in-use built from cultural, historical, educational, societal and need related foci, but not all schools exhibit the type of metaphorical and pedagogical language under review.

## 4.3 The Data Sets

The aim within the Depiction Phase was to capture thick descriptions (Ryle, 1949) of various types (images, montages, field note extracts and other texts) to demonstrate the innate qualities of the language-in-use within each school. This meant using a broad spectrum of data which was collated as two separate data sets – the first consisted of recordings of the varied perspectives and lived experiences presented orally by participants within conversations and interviews, and the second set captured messages from a wide range of multifaceted text types. Both data sets were obtained for each of the schools. The only exceptions to having two sets of identical sources were in Data Set 1 (as in Figure 4.1) where:

- Sunny Fields State School was a small school, and therefore did not have an Assistant Principal,

- At Forrester Hill State School, the Assistant Principal had left and the recently appointed one was not included,

- I could not record my initial impressions of Forrester Hill because I had worked there for over 10 years.

As depicted in Figure 4.1, for each school, after the initial interviews were complete, the audio data were transcribed and then all data were viewed using the filters. Two data sets were collated for each site. The first set consisted of the oral digital recordings, and the second was related to the multifaceted texts.
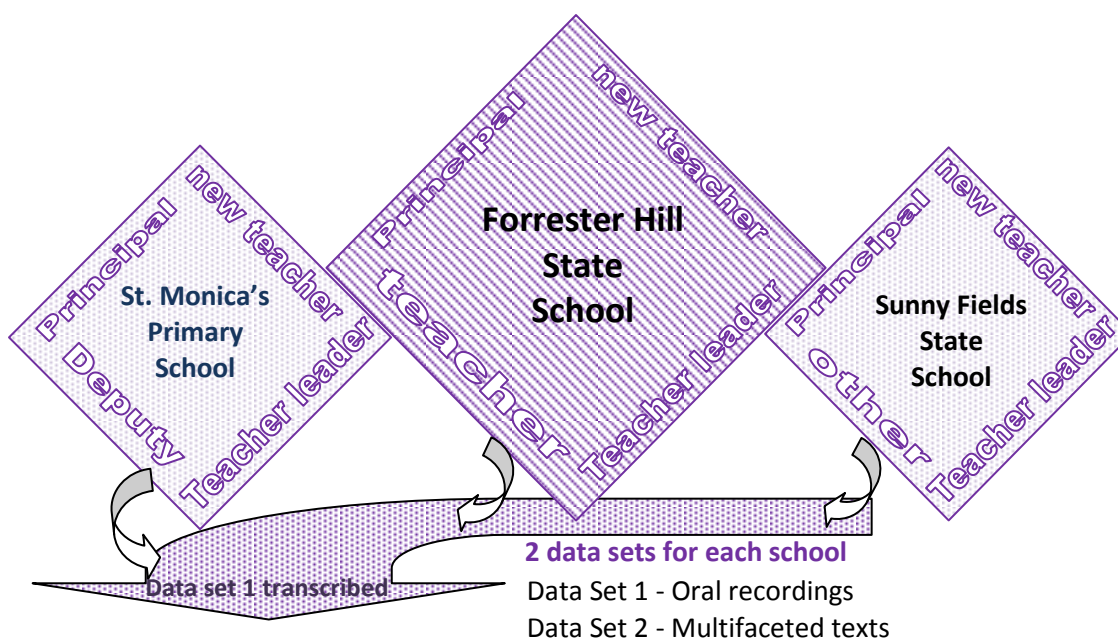


Figure 4.1 The two data sets

**Data Set 1: A variety of oral recordings from:**

- Principal
- Deputy Principal (at St. Monica's)
- Teacher leaders
- Teacher (at Forrester Hill)
- A new teacher to the school

By unpacking the transcribed texts taken from the oral recordings in Data Set 1, it was possible to focus on the following aspects: notable points made (points deemed significant by either the participant, through tone of voice or the repetition of a concept, or the researcher due to repetitive words, phrases or concepts being

uncovered); frequently occurring 'mental stereo imaging' (references to similes, analogies, acronyms related to a theme, or metaphors themselves); the processes (the thinking and actions that are unpacked); and references to the school's vision, values, and schoolwide pedagogical frameworks. This last point was one of major significance because each of the schools had a comprehensively developed vision, set of values, and a pedagogical framework that had been created to guide practice and decision making within the school.

It is also important to note that although the processes, mental stereo imaging and references to vision, values, and schoolwide pedagogy were explored as separate entities, they were all extracted from the notable points. In many cases, it was these components that had made the point worth noting in the first place.

The multifaceted texts of Data Set 2 gave important insights into whether elements from the IDEAS artefacts of vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy 'lived' in these schools – if so then which elements and of what importance were they?

Data Set 2: Multifaceted texts:

- Websites
- Newsletters
- Posters/banners/displays/photographs
- Student work and classroom observations
- My first impressions (not possible for FHSS) on entering the school
- Electronic and/or hard copy records of IDEAS meetings

It was this second data set that provided the details about the visuals that portrayed messages of one form or another to school community members or to outsiders. It was important to ascertain whether the messages portrayed within these multifaceted texts were just adornments on walls and documents, or whether they were brought to life within classrooms and general school practices.

## 4.4 The First Phase of Interpretation
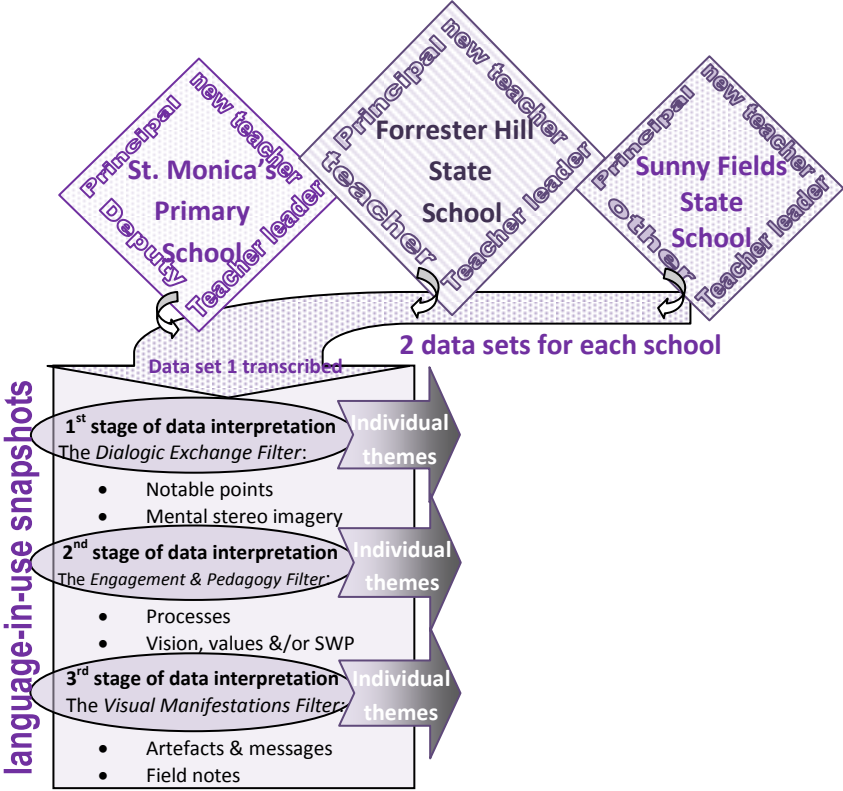
Figure 4.2 Commencement of Phase 1 – the Depiction

In the early stages of Phase 1 (the Depiction Phase), each school's data were examined individually with no cross-referencing between school data sets. This is indicated by the separate diamond shaped boxes within Figure 4.2. As I worked with the data from each school, I felt that it was important to interpret each data set as an entity in itself. In an effort to ensure that the understandings from each site were less influenced by the freshness of the data interpretations being made, I allowed a fortnight to pass between initial analyses of each site's transcripts and texts.

### 4.4.1 Viewing the data

Interpreting the data involved analysing the transcripts of the recordings, the field notes taken, and any additional multifaceted texts obtained from each of the schools. The transcripts from each school (taken from Data Set 1) were viewed through the first two filters. The *Dialogic Exchange Filter* analysed the dialogue of each of the participants isolating notable points that resonated from within the transcripts, as

well as identifying examples of 'mental stereo imagining'. The *Engagement and Pedagogy Filter* captured the dynamic nature of the day-to-day happenings taking place in each school and were identified by focussing on the processes and pedagogical indicators (vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical frameworks), and the action words related to these that were apparent within the transcripts or observations. The *Visual Manifestations Filter* explored the artefacts and written records of the school and the field notes taken by the researcher as an observer (Data Set 2).

These filters had been determined in part by the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, in part by my own understanding of what constituted a holistic view of language, and in part by the nature of the research questions themselves. Influenced by the work of van Manen, I saw myself as a human scientist who takes 'reality' as a valid source of evidence by which to document lived experience (Dilthey, 1976; Lanigan, 1992; van Manen, 1997). "The return to the human science paradigm is refocussing attention on the performance and practice of persons communicating at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and cultural levels of context" (Lanigan, 1992, p. 2). Thus to truly capture the reality of the language-in-use within these schools it was necessary to document individual thoughts and group thoughts taken from dialogic exchanges and personal reflections which had been transcribed. To view 'the performance and practice' of language required not only an understanding of language characteristics but an understanding of how the ideas and concepts articulated were being enacted within the school community. This led to the need for a filter that identified engagement and pedagogy. Finally, the visual manifestations filter was used to view language and its meaning in respect to the "non-verbal forms of language" (Lankshear, 1996, p. 21) clearly evident within each school context.

When combined the filters enabled a strong depiction of the phenomenon to be presented and I was able to:

- capture the fundamental characteristics of the contextually specific language under investigation.

- understand the significance of the language and how it was being utilised in the day-to-day endeavours within each school.

- examine how the 'language-in-use' was, or was not, complemented by visual reinforcements in conjunction with other forms of documentation and complementary practices.

The clarification of each of these dot points was essential to answering the research questions themselves.

## 4.4.2 The filters of the Depiction Phase (Phase 1)

The phases of depiction, reduction, interpretation and implications are directly related to the Merleau-Ponty's hermeneutic phases of reduction to essence. Within Phase 1 each filter application involved a number of stages and sub-sets or steps in order to deduce both meaning and relevance from the data.

**Phase 1 - 1st stage (*Applying the Dialogic Exchange Filter*)**

The first stage within Phase 1 was to conduct a search for points of significance that might indicate either theme or 'Essence'. Each data set was explored separately, according to the role of each participant, using the *Dialogic Exchange Filter* and its sub-sets of notable points and 'mental stereo imaging'.

1.  Notable points, 'mental stereo imagings' and points of emphasis were identified.

2.  To complete the application of the *Dialogic Exchange Filter* 'mental stereo imaging' and notable points were grouped according to a number of overarching ideas deemed significant.

**Phase 1 - 2nd stage (*Applying the Engagement and Pedagogy Filter*)**

In Stage 2, the search for evidence of whether cultural artefacts such as vision/values/schoolwide pedagogical principles had impact within the school the following steps were taken:

1.  Processes (verbs or verb groups) as identified within the collated notable points were grouped into lists and placed in alphabetical order to quickly identify those used most frequently, for example, a series of references to

*building relationships* appearing one under the other were easily identified as important. (See Tables 4.2 and 4.3 for examples.)

2. If any process words had negative implications were circled for later examination to determine the exact reference and context in order to determine their true meaning.

*3.* Direct references to a school's vision, values, or elements taken from a school's schoolwide pedagogy were highlighted for later collation.

**Phase 1 - 3<sup>rd</sup> stage (*Applying the Visual Manifestations Filter*)**

Within the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage the role played by visual artefacts, field notes and personal observations was examined taking the following steps:

1. Field notes and general observations about each school context (appearances and practices) were scrutinised for additional understandings linked to historical and present priorities and how these had evolved.

2. Photographs, charts, displays, workshop documentations, websites and information leaflets were explored for images which either continually reoccurred, or participants had given emphasis to when speaking.

3. Themes and images (both verbal and visual) were sequenced according to a timeline of where each 'fitted' into the unfolding IDEAS journey of each school. (Forrester Hill's example can be seen in Appendix L)

As each of these interpretative stages of Phase 1 unfolded the first indicators of 'Essence' began to emerge. These were placed at the end of each section within a broken text box for later collation.

## 4.5 Examples of Filter Application

All schools were viewed through the same three filters in the manner described. Complete data banks have been included in the appendixes, however, to illustrate how the depictions were derived, an example of the ways of working related to each filter are presented. Within this section only one school is referred to each time. The

purpose was to present an example of each stage in Phase 1 so that when collated as 'a depiction' the underlying creation process for each was clear. Any step of analysis applied to one school's data was applied to each of the other two.

## 4.5.1 Example 1: Applying the *Dialogic Exchange Filter*

<u>Step 1</u> - In applying the *Dialogic Exchange Filter,* the following three excerpts taken from the transcripts of St. Monica's participants demonstrate how the verbal 'mental stereo imaging' (highlighted in yellow) and notable points (italicised) were isolated from the bulk of the transcript. I have taken extracts from each of the St. Monica's transcripts to illustrate the use of this filter. The first of these is an extract taken from the full version of the Principal's transcript (which can be viewed in Appendix L). All extracts were derived in a similar manner. Within the excerpts, blue referred to a common theme or possible 'Indicator of Essence' running through all the extracts taken from that site. The grey highlighting indicates emphasis being made by the participant.

**Excerpt 4.1 Higher understanding**

> **Taken from Principal's transcript (Appendix M, p. 1)**
>
> …traditionally… people … speak nicely and well to one another. I think sometimes when people think about professional dialogue – well - Dave talks about the country club aspect…
>
> Now the journey - we've moved a long way now! *Now it's really teachers getting to a higher level…There's a far greater pedagogical focus when talking to one another and the thing that really inspires me …is they will come … and have conversations about things that are not working for them…* "D..., the large increase in numbers of children this year, which we haven't had in the past, we aren't making the sort of ground in terms of student outcome that we would like to" …*It's not often that somebody knocks on the principal's door and says we don't think things are working for us as well as they should be. I think that that's definitely attributable to the professional dialogue in this school and trust and it's also about leadership…* It's really significant - this would not have happened at the beginning of our IDEAS journey.

Legend: This legend applies to the colour coding within Excerpts 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3
Yellow represents mental stereo imaging where one concept or understanding is represented in light of another
Blue refers to a common theme or possible Indictor of Essence
Grey indicates where emphasis has been placed by a participant's gesture, intonation or through phrase or word repetition

**Excerpt 4.2 Parallel leadership**

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**Excerpt 4.2 Taken from the teacher's transcript**

It actually got to the point in our journey where it was not the IDEAS team driving the research as other people started to bring in things to share. It was really good and I think that is why it has been able to be embedded so well in everything we do. *People have been part of it they really own it and we all worked so hard to make sure this was something that was really useable and had depth of meaning for everyone …*

*With the children they will often say 'Oh I took a risk today when I did this or they might say I succeeded today with this and at the end of the day they might say well we soared our kites to the highest height (which is our metaphor for being the best we can be) when we did this or that.* We actually take the time for them to put up their hands and share these celebrations of learning. We have had many conversations with the kids about how that is a hill which is a challenge and the kid can be a boy or a girl and we talk about the joys of challenging yourself and achieving which is when the kite flies at its highest height.

---

**Excerpt 4.3 Prioritising according to context need**

---

**Excerpt 4.3 Taken from Assistant-Principal's transcript**

When we were bringing in the ideas process there were some of the curriculum things that we put on the back burner because we were dedicating lots of time to ideas and all the staff were part of the conversations. *It was through the development of good professional learning teams and a learning community that staff can have really rich conversations about numeracy and our advisor from CEO actually commented that our school is in a very exciting place compared to some places because of the rich conversations that happen every day – that we are seeing ourselves as learners not just as teachers.* This allows us to go into conversations about numeracy in other ways and how we should be teaching the children. It (IDEAS) umbrellas everything.

**Where does learning takes place? Is there a particular space or place ?**

We are the space! *We have been trying to focus in the last few terms on rich learning tasks, differentiation, allowing the children to take responsibility for their own learning, empowering them to make decisions and decide what they need to work on now.* Individualising things more so that they can build strength, to bring success but also to have that thinking, that conversation and reflection and the time. The kites have sort of taken us in that direction. *I don't think we would have been in this place, in this mental space without the connection that the kites (metaphor) has given us.*

---

Step 2 - To complete the application of the *Dialogic Exchange Filter* 'mental stereo imagings' and notable points were grouped according to a number of overarching ideas deemed significant. Significance was 'measured' according to the tonality of the respondent's voice and by meaning being emphasised or repeated within the

narrative. For example, the St. Monica's principal had emphasised the following by really looking at me and inviting affirmation as to the significance of the occurrence and she states:

> I thought this was significant. It's not often that somebody knocks on the principal's door and says we don't think things are working for us as well as they should be. I think that that's definitely attributable to the professional dialogue in this school and trust and it's also about leadership. So I think those three things are working here. And I think that's a clear example of it.

The transcripts from all respondents were examined in this manner. Then the identified points of significance from both the notable points and the 'mental stereo imaging' references were drawn together and collated. Table 4.1 is an example of this process of collation taken from St. Monica's with the blue still signifying a theme thread but with the addition of green which I refer to as a point of reflection following the table.

The phrases in bold within the teacher leader's 'Points of Significance', Table 4.1, indicate the emergence of a theme either because of the amount of emphasis placed by the teacher leader or the repeated reference to similar actions. For example, the first theme is related to the power and uniqueness of the school's vision because she refers a number of times to the vision helping to move the process forward, and how it was grounded in their sense of spirituality and their Catholic faith. Theme two refers to the "inevitability of the KITE pedagogy from the vision". This came from references by the teacher leader to "serendipity", "the KITES just seemed meant to be", "our kids really connect to the image of the kite, kite flying is both fun and a challenge, like learning", and "once we had decided that our pedagogy must involve a focus on knowledge, innovation, and taking risks – the rest just flowed out of that". These themes would later be collated in order to ascertain 'Indicators of Essence'.

**Table 4.1 Points of significance**

| **Points of significance from St. Monica's teacher leader (TL)** | |
| --- | --- |
| **The power and the uniqueness of vision**<br>• Owning process, vision and movement forward<br>• Linking our spirituality to our vision<br>**Inevitability of KITE Pedagogy from vision**<br>• The fun nature of the image connects with students<br>**Initially no shared language even about values – fundamental inconsistencies**<br>• Discussing and clarifying the meaning of the vision words – creating a shared meaning system<br>• It takes time to make understandings explicit<br>**Dedicated time to developing common understandings of quality pedagogy**<br>• Exploring authoritative pedagogies<br>• Collective responsibility for professional learning<br>**Developing depth of meaning**<br>• Long way to go but such a long way from the start<br>**Students have high expectations of themselves and their teachers**<br>• I am so organised now – the students expect it of me | **Shared language shared understandings**<br>• Using the language with others no matter where I am (year levels)<br>• Having the language to go forward<br>**Parallel leadership**<br>• Aides empowered to contribute<br>• Self-evaluation, self-improvement and peer assessment<br>• Evolution of parent involvement to the point of parent's running meetings<br>**Articulating the power of the metaphor for both teachers and students**<br>• Parents relate to the metaphor and how it connects to our spiritual roots<br>**Positive relationships** (No blame)<br>• The foundation on which learning grows<br>**Discovering the need to change and changing to meet the need**<br>• Wanting to get things right<br>**Recording the special times**<br>• Visuals are important<br>**Focussing on metacognition, integration, differentiation**<br>• Teacher partnerships of learning<br>**Teachers journaling and reflecting**<br>• Looking for ways to improve |

*One theme of particular significance to the teacher leader, as interpreted from Table 4.1, was directly related to the pedagogical nature of the current language-in-use within St. Monica's. In this first layer of interpretation there existed a clear cognisance of the significance of 'their' metaphorically rich language-in-use and how the level of pedagogical conversation and shared understandings had greatly increased (the sections in green).*

*This is interesting in light of how the past did not feature prominently in any negative way within the St Monica narratives - although the Principal did speak of things being 'a bit rocky' and there being a 'country club' aspect to the congenial relationships that had existed in the school. I think that my analysis must return to this theme at a later date.*

This collation indicates the importance of St. Monica's 'language-in-use' for the teacher leader who was very specific in her references to how the language of pedagogy now evident in the school had allowed staff to 'go forward', and how the

professional learning community had worked "to make meaning clear and useable" and to develop "depth of meaning".

Within all excerpts the IDEAS process itself was seen as a journey of significance to the school community as a whole. This has been indicated by the blue wording running throughout the excerpts. Within her transcript (Appendix M) the Principal refers to "parents on board", "developing a journey", "the journey has been creating connectedness", "initiating notions and ideas are journeys themselves" and other indicators of being on a journey as a whole school community. These themes were echoed by others as shown in Excerpt 4.4 using quotes taken from the New Teacher who as (indicated by the blue writing) talks of "knowledge [that] gets move around" and a sense of being "on board" and the journey was seen as being created "by and for those on board".

**Excerpt 4.4 The sense of being on a journey**

> **The new teacher's sense of being on a journey**
>
> ***What were your first impressions of St. Monica's?***
> I must admit I did not understand the background to it – I had never heard of IDEAS. I remember talking to an old friend from my old school ringing up and she said what's it like there. I said well we're doing KITES. KITES? What is that? But even without the background info I was able to explain to her what it was and how it worked and that it was good – it worked well. Everyone was so into it and so excited about it – you could see how hard they had worked at developing what they had. They had been on a journey together and everyone was so enthused that you couldn't help but pick up on that energy. It's pretty well everyone that is on board. I found there was knowledge that could move around – it did not matter if I talked to the teacher next door or to one from Stage 1. Knowledge seemed to be travelling around with this done consciously. A common language had been developed on their journey I guess.
>
> ***Where do you think understandings takes place here?***
> I think that often it is within the metacognition process. When you sit back and have the time to process things – think about what you've done, think about how you have done it and then reflect on that –well it is that reflection space that is a big part of it for me. Maybe that is where the knowledge gets moved around. My learning and greater understanding comes through that chain of thinking in my head. That space is not just for me – I will call the children down, after we have done a particular activity – or worked on some teaching learning strategies we'll talk about it – I'll let them talk about it so how did you find it? What did you like? What didn't you like? Why didn't you like it? How did it work for you? How can we make it better? They really think about their own learning! We'll go around the group. Let's check if you've learnt something – what do you now know that you didn't before? If we set an assignment or another learning task to follow on from this – what should it look like? How would you like that presented – what do we need when we are drawing up a rubric? Tell me? What do you think would get you an A, a B, a C? So they really do have input. That really helps the children take ownership when they know that they are listened to and that some of their suggestions are followed through.

Few specifics about the journey were articulated. None-the-less, the direction appeared clear to the participants as the journey was heading towards school improvement.

**What about the other schools?**

The fundamental nature of this sense of journey can also been found in quotes taken from the other school collations. Extracts from these parts of each transcript were included in the 'notable points' tables of each school. At Sunny Fields the teacher explains that "the only thing you can do is keep improving your pedagogies, it's a journey, it's the only way forward... and I mean that's what all of IDEAS is about ultimately"; while the principal speaks of how:

> understanding takes place in our common language about how and what we teach – and why. You only realise how far you have come along the learning journey when you have to leave a plan for a relief teacher. It's really hard to do that now as we've done so much together and come so far in our understandings of good literacy pedagogy.

Forrester Hill staff also speak of how they have been on a never ending learning journey. The teacher speaks of a past when

> I just remember when we had staff meetings or Pupil Free Days, we used to chat around issues and not really get anywhere. It was so frustrating. We didn't seem to know how to get somewhere, we did not talk at a deep level about anything really. But now we look at research, we look at our data ...we have a good look at things that matter in our context...and now we know – even if we change direction from time to time – we still know where we're heading.

And while still an IDEAS facilitator at Forrester Hill, I had written "this has been a long journey and it took us a while to get anywhere at all. But now we've got the momentum up, as a community, we have really started to progress" (Personal journal entry, 2007).

At each of the schools, the travellers on the journey, the participants, expressed a sense of power and ownership over which tracks to take. These were based on

student and community needs, as well as personal and professional enrichment. This theme was more than just a possible indicator and in fact became the first 'Indicator of Essence' to be fully articulated. It was therefore placed within a broken text box to conclude this section.

---

**Indicator of Essence 1: Embarking on a continuous learning journey**

There is a sense of journey uniqueness and professional learning echoed throughout the transcripts.

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## 4.5.2 Example 2: Applying the *Engagement and Pedagogy Filter*

Step 1 – To ascertain the connection between the Forrester Hill language-in-use and actions occurring within the school, the main process words or groups of words emergent from the transcripts were grouped in table form to gain insight into how people worked within their context. Once tabled the processes were placed in alphabetical order. To narrow the field under review I removed those that were more neutral in character. An example of what I mean by neutral processes (indicated by the writing which is crossed out) can be seen in Table 4.2. Disconnected from context, and thus meaning, I felt that it was difficult to say if these words had either positive or negative connotations and so for the purpose of this step these were excluded from the second stage of table creation, even though when placed in context many of these indicated positive action, for example "longing for" could have meant 'longing for the way things used to be' or 'longing for a new approach' – it did in fact mean longing for improved student outcomes.

**Table 4.2 The processes within the new teacher's transcript**

| The processes within New Teacher transcript Forrester Hill | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| acknowledging | building | embracing | linking | sensing |
| accepting others | ~~capturing~~ | **empowering** | ~~living together~~ | **sharing** |
| will lead | caring | **empowered to** | mediating | **shared** |
| achieving | **celebrating** | **make a difference** | offering | stepping forward |
| acting | **celebrate success** | encouraging | ~~portraying~~ | ~~standing for~~ |
| articulating | ~~collecting~~ | (excluding) | promoting | supporting |
| ~~asking~~ | committing | giving | ~~recognising~~ | understanding |
| attaining | connecting | growing | reinforcing | upholding |
| authenticating | ~~contacting~~ | heralding | resolving | validating |
| (banishing) | conveying | including | **responding** | valuing new input |
| | defining | leading parades | **responsive action** | |
| | dialoguing | (students) | **responding to need** | |
| | | ~~longing for~~ | | |

However, there were enough process words with strongly subjective meanings so it was possible to exclude the neutral ones, as they did not require further exploration in order to understand the actions taking place within these schools.

The bold writing within Table 4.2 indicates where repetition occurred and in Table 4.3 these repeated references were reduced to a single word with an X placed beside it to indicate that this word or its meaning had been mentioned more than once. Table 4.3 shows the data from Table 4.2 reduced to the final minimalised version.

**Table 4.3 The processes within the New Teacher transcripts**

| The processes within New Teacher transcript Forrester Hill | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| acknowledging<br>accepting others<br>will lead<br>achieving<br>acting<br>articulating<br>attaining<br>authenticating<br>banishing | building<br>caring<br>celebrating x<br>committing<br>connecting<br>conveying<br>defining<br>dialoguing | embracing<br>empowering x<br>encouraging<br>excluding<br>giving<br>growing<br>heralding<br>including<br>leading parades<br>(students) | linking<br>mediating<br>offering<br>promoting<br>reinforcing<br>resolving<br>responding x | sensing<br>sharing x<br>stepping forward<br>supporting<br>understanding<br>upholding<br>validating<br>valuing new input |

Table 4.4 is another Forrester Hill example of this final stage of examining the 'processes', this time from the point of view of the principal

**Table 4.4 The processes within the Principal's transcript**

| The processes within Principal transcript at Forrester Hill | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| accepting X<br>acknowledging<br>aligning<br>allowing<br>appreciating<br>authenticating X<br>breathing<br>building<br>caring<br>celebrating<br>centring<br>committing<br>communicating<br>connecting,<br>creating X | developing<br>differentiating<br>doing<br>drawing<br>embracing X<br>enacting<br>engaging<br>enjoying<br>enlightening<br>espousing<br>exciting<br>exemplifying<br>expecting<br>fostering X<br>growing | hoping<br>identifying<br>improving X<br>interacting<br>involving<br>journeying<br>knowing<br>layering<br>leading X<br>learning<br>liking<br>linking<br>listening X<br>loving | making<br>motivating<br>not blaming X<br>nurturing X<br>owning<br>permitting<br>playing<br>practising<br>promoting<br>pushing<br>reaching<br>reflecting X<br>relating<br>resolving<br>responding | respecting<br>retaining<br>skilling<br>solving<br>supporting<br>sustaining X<br>teaching<br>travelling<br>trusting<br>understanding<br>unifying<br>value adding<br>valuing X<br>working |

The tabled processes from Forrester Hill formed a cohesive and vibrant group indicating energy (for example; motivating, promoting, embracing, valuing), commitment (for example; acting, authenticating, stepping forward, committing, interacting) and an ability by staff to action what was being clearly articulated (for example; attaining, skilling, practising, reaching, creating, doing, empowering). Some related to a before and after view of the world – *before* becoming an IDEAS facilitated learning community and *after* a period of 8 years of sustained commitment to school improvement. This proved to be a valuable insight into how these Forrester Hill staff make sense of who they are, what their children need and how to provide for those needs.

**What about the other schools?**

At the other two schools many similar process words (or action groupings) emerged from the transcripts. Some of these seemed particularly empowering and dynamic, for example the Sunny Fields Principal speaks of: "supporting and growing"; "living it breathing it"; "providing strength"; "promoting student voice, and praising". The Teacher Leader refers to: "fine tuning practice"; "empathising"; "individualising"; and "caring" while the New Teacher talks of "viewing through our lens"; "catering for each student"; and, "constantly reflecting". At St. Monica's the Teacher Leader speaks of: "moving forward"; "noticing quality"; "self-evaluating"; "developing depth", and the Principal speaks of "taking learning and embedding it", "transforming", and "empowering students". Such examples represent a sample of the expressions of energy and commitment uttered by the participants at St. Monica's.

This contextually constructed language demanded to be described, interpreted and reduced to its 'Essence'. The importance of how the language translated into action in the 'life-world' of these schools required clarification and by loosely grouping thinking and action or 'process' words together, I was able to highlight these as a driving force within the pheneomenon that contributed to facilitation of the change process. I was, in fact, not interested in how these words specified their function in a grammatical sense, but rather how they became indicators of actions taken or capable of being taken within the school. A one-off reference to a process indicating positive action would have been of little importance, however, these words of action when

grouped together, across roles and then schools, formed a crucial glimpse into the shared mental models of how the participants at all three sites acted on new understandings pertinent to their contexts. This exercise had revealed a key indicator of the essential character of the school community as a whole and pointed towards not only a language theme but possibly 'Essence'.

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**Indicator of Essence 2a: Sharing mental models leads to the possibility of collective action**

Repeated references to similar processes by all participants became indicators of the mental models that formed the groundwork for action within the school.

---

<u>Step 2</u> – When exploring the process words, I also sought out negative or neutral process indicators. It was here that the action of *excluding* stood out. Although banishing had also been circled, when placed in context within the New Teacher transcript, it was found that she was talking about banishing fears of exclusion. It was the word exclusion and the action of excluding that were referred to with negative connotations. When viewed in context within the transcript, the New Teacher was expressing her concern that a strong school culture could prove to be alienating by nature.

> I think being part of a learning community is so strong at Forrester Hill – that if you sit on the outside then you really are alone. It wasn't like that for me... I love the visual – that to me is a huge thing. I need the visual, I am a visual person, I love that as I can see that and it is there as something that sits in my head allowing me to be a part of it all. The connections are made at all times and I think that means that people truly believe in the importance of these connections. If I had come in and I couldn't see it all around me, then no it would not mean anything to me. I think I would have thought that this is something that is done at this school, not that this is something that is a part of this school. Its strength did not exclude me – in fact the opposite – I felt so much a part of it all very quickly.

So although the new teacher indicated that she in no way felt excluded herself she still "could see that that could happen". Once articulated it grew in importance as was a reminder that strong metaphorical mental maps may be restrictive in some manner for those new to a school and may alienate those on the 'outside' of the deeply inherent meanings (Lakoff & Johnston, 1980; Morgan, 1980). Raising awareness of exclusion as being a possible product of a strongly individualistic school culture meant that other signs or countersigns were looked for as the analysis progressed.

Throughout this step, I was highly conscious of the fact that words taken out of context are basically without clear meaning (Bahktin, 1984; Halliday, 1974). Because this exercise was never intended to be a linguistic, grammatical or semiotic analysis, but was instead designed to give an overall impression of language vibrancy (or lack of), no further text analysis of this nature occurs.

Step 3 – In order to examine the significance of the school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles each of the respondent's transcripts was viewed, and specific references highlighted and collated.

The following excerpts are indicative of this process:

**Excerpt 4.5 Developing student leadership**

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**Taken from Principal's transcript at Forrester Hill**

*A good example lately is the Year 7's when I took them out to H...for the student Leadership Development session.* The dialogue that they used in a recount of what happened on that day reflects their appreciation …of me and their teachers for … supporting them in that. *They really look at what things mean for the school so they articulated straight away what student leadership means in our school. They related opportunities straight back to our PODS and values. Look at their recounts – they really reflect that. They weren't lost for what it meant for them they made the connections for themselves.*

---

**Excerpt 4.6 Identifying the essentials**

> ### Taken from teacher transcript at Forrester Hill
>
> When people plan they are thinking about the essentials … the audited essentials per term, we talk about exemplars we talk moderation we talk criteria sheets and how to be consistent in our planning and delivery of materials. With behaviour management we are all speaking the same language so from Prep to Yr 7 *we are using the same terminology and that consistency really makes a difference for our students. It's all related to our vision and SWP and the PODS sheet has the same meaning for all of us. Our values for example, respect, responsibility, individual dignity and worth, the kids know what these mean and what the expectations of or school community are. We use the same language when we talk to kids about making good choices in their learning and in their behaviour.*

**Excerpt 4.7 Collective commitment**

> ### Taken from a new teacher's transcript Forrester Hill
>
> IDEAS is unique for me… it is definitely the support, definitely the relationships – the relationships is the thing I think because at other schools I've been in, the relationships are there, but there is always an underlying concept of them and us when looking at the admin and staff. Here… *it's never presented in that top down way, whether that is just clever presenting – I don't know – but the focus is always as the whole school … We is a deeply meant we and I think that this is because of the common goals, the vision, the pedagogy, I think as a staff everyone clearly knows where we are going and we are very much all on that train and we are going there together, so when things do come through that we need to do they are presented as – this is helping us get to here we need to be.*

The significance of the highlighted words: supporting them; the connections (taken from Excerpt 4.5); our vision, SWP; PODS sheet; values; respect; responsibility; individual dignity and worth (taken from Excerpt 4. 6); support; relationships; vision; pedagogy; going there together (taken from Excerpt 4.7) can be seen when Forrester Hill's combined artefacts are placed together in order to discover the links being made. Montage 4.1 illustrates this by the boxed words identifying how the artefacts of vision, values and SWP can be found within many of the school's texts. These are indicative of the shared mental models that now exist between these partici

**Montage 4.1 Combined vision, values and SWP at Forrester Hill State School**

**Growing Together**

The trunk of the tree grows stronger each day:

We grow together by building strong relationships:

- Celebrating differences in learning styles, cultures & backgrounds

- Teaching & modeling through a strong values program

- Linking activities to local, community & cultural experiences

**Learning Forever**

Leaves, flowers & pods are the signs of a healthy tree:

We learn and display skills for a bright future:

- Problem solving in real life situations

- Quality communication through substantive conversation

- Confidence building equipping individuals with the skills, knowledge & strategies to deal with change

Our VISION

*Growing Together*
*Learning Forever*

**W** Growing Together

**Learning Forever**

**S** Supporting Each Other **P**

**Supporting Each Other**

The roots of the tree support it through life –

We support our school community through:

- Acknowledging & supporting individuality

- Encouraging risk taking within safe boundaries

- Using our 'Vision program' & self-reflection to improve social & academic skills

Overall Respect

Practising Safety

Demonstrating Learning

PODS behaviours

Showing Responsibility

FHSS

School

Values

Respect
Responsibility
Cooperation
Confidence
Participation
Honesty
Individual Dignity & Worth

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It was not only the Forrester Hill data that showed such a connection to shared collective artefacts and pedagogies. At St. Monica's the Principal refers to "our vision for learning" captured in the words *From this hill we will soar*. The teacher leader talks of the "pride in the uniqueness of the vision" and the "inevitability of the KITE pedagogy" and how it simplifies things and "makes it easy to make the connections for students and parents". The New Teacher agrees and explains how "referring to the visuals keeps us focussed and centred – aligned" and the Principal states that "our vision and SWP has opened up the way and removed barriers across the school".

While at Sunny Fields the process of "living it breathing it" referred directly to the school's schoolwide pedagogy or SMARTS pedagogy. The SMARTS pedagogy stands for teaching and learning that is **S**ocial, supportive, structured and student centred; focussed on **M**ulti-age, multiple intelligences; and is **A**ctive, artistic, and aiming high for achievement; framed by **R**outines, risk-taking and resilience; in **T**eams working with technology and higher order thinking skills. The SMARTS pedagogy was their means of capturing the aligned practices between the principal and teacher leader so that others could share their combined understandings of the types of practices best suited to the needs of their students. The Principal also speaks of the unique language at the school and "people like the feel of the school – in part it's the language of our vision, BUDS values and SMARTS that creates that feel". (The BUDS acronym stands for **B**e honest and responsible; **U**se respect; **D**o your best; and **S**how care, understanding and fairness.)

Reflecting on the place that a school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles played within the life-worlds of these schools revealed new understandings indicative of essence. However, these understandings were still linked to the previous one and so I considered this as another facet of Indicator of

> **Indicator of Essence 2 b: Mental models that translate into practice are enhanced by strong cultural message givers**
>
> Rich-metaphors related to a school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy are powerful message givers within a school community as they strengthen shared mental models.

Essence 2.

## 4.5.3 Example 3: Applying the Visual Manifestations Filter

<u>Step 1</u> – Application of the *Visual Manifestations Filter* began with exploring the field notes taken on visits to schools. These notes were a conscious attempt to capture, in a hermeneutic phenomenological manner, the feel and impression of each school. Excerpts and images from Sunny Fields are used as an example of this filter's application.

**Excerpt 4.8 Taken from field notes at Sunny Fields**

---

**Taken from field notes**

On parking my car at the front gate of Sunny Fields State School, I was greeted by a well kept expanse of grass with school buildings and a large bottle tree spread out in front of me. There was the peace and quiet of a small country school and the school sign at the gate assured me that the school's focus was on *Growing beautiful futures in the valley of opportunities.* A sense of positivity and possibility became linked in my mind to the words of this vision.

On entering the office I was greeted by a wall of images celebrating the school's values and schoolwide pedagogy with the central motif being a poster of happy children's faces centred within sunflowers. Pamphlets celebrating the school community lay on the desk and the buzz of student voices focussed on learning could be heard in the background.

There was no-one to greet me as it is a small school of only 3 teachers and 69 students. The principal was teaching in the room attached to the office so I stood quietly watching and waiting for an appropriate moment to attract her attention. I did not wish to disrupt the lesson and this allowed me a moment in time to observe the natural flow of the learning taking place, as well as time to listen to the unself-conscious give and take of dialogic exchange between teacher and students. This is what I noted within my reflection diary –



> *Conversations and laughter abound in the classroom but then sometimes concentrated quietness descends as students wrestle with a new understanding or a revision 'test'. There are few children who are not focussed on the learning task at hand.*

These tests, I learn later, are used to work out which reading group each student should be placed in for the next fortnight. Testing is done every week and changes made every fortnight so that individual needs can be addressed in a timely manner. The professionalism and commitment from these teachers shines out from the conversations I am witness to.

---

<u>Step 2</u> – When exploring the multifaceted texts (photographs, displays, school records, websites and information leaflets) the significance of the schoolwide pedagogy (using the acronym of SMART) and the school values (identified by the acronym BUDS) sprang to life, as they both reinforced and reflected the culture. Images were viewed in conjunction with the field notes to add further insight to their importance. Sunny Fields is used as an example of the insights gained by application of the *Visual Manifestations Filter.*

**Schoolwide Pedagogy:**

At Sunny Fields we work **SMART** together using teaching and learning that is:



> **S** - social, supportive, structured and
>      student centred
> **M** - multi-age, multiple intelligence
> **A** - active, artistic, aiming high,
>      achievement
> **R** - routines, risk-taking, resilience
> **T** - teams, technology, thinking skills

**Values:**



> **B.U.D.S.**
> **B**e honest and responsible
> **U**se respect
> **D**o your best
> **S**how care, understanding and fairness

There were visual representations of the students themselves as buds (representative of each student's continued growth and potential), as well as numerous depictions by the students themselves and explicit links to the BUDS within each student's learning journal. The significance of BUDS became more apparent on reading the first page of a Student Learning Journal. Students related strongly to these values and clearly understood what potential and growth meant to them and their learning. Teachers also related to the BUD metaphor and referred to it regularly in classroom

dialogue with students. My field notes referred to other impressions I had about the significance of BUDS within the Sunny Fields community. The summarised field notes below add further meaning.

**Excerpt 4.9 Summary of field notes from Sunny Fields (1st visit)**

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**Summary of field notes (1ˢᵗ visit)**

BUDS values hold a strong meaning for the student and teacher community. What are the ramifications of meaning? Linked to image of rural community:

- Linked to new growth – young bodies - new learning
- Values orientation based on sense of community – Be honest & responsible, Use respect, Do your best, Show care understanding & fairness
- A rich-metaphor – nurturing, providing what is needed for buds to grow, potential, hope, future possibilities
- Linked to pedagogical concept of growing smarter
- Multi-age appropriate symbolism
- Sunflower students welcome visitors and new families to the school
- Linked to learning (learning journal)

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**Excerpt 4.10 Summary of field notes from Sunny Fields (3rd visit)**

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**Summary of field notes (3ʳᵈ visit)**

Each learning journal records a student's learning journey. This in itself a rich-metaphor which indicates:

- identifying starting point and progress with ups and downs being part of the journey
- what occurs along the journey contributes to learning
- articulation of experience is part of the learning experience and helps to consolidate learning
- sharing a learning journey with others is part of the fun
- there is a strong element of inquiry and sense of achievement
- pride on display as learning achievements enhance self-confidence and self-esteem
- celebrating success is a constant action
- self reflection and self responsibility go hand-in-hand

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On prominent display on the staffroom noticeboard was a diagnostic data comparison between 2005 and 2008 and a joyful commentary about the progress made as a school community. There were photographs of celebrations and inspirational quotes related to learning and community (seen captured in Montage 4.2). The red sections within Montage 1 point towards another essence indicator emerging.

**Montage 4.2 Combined field notes and photographic records for Sunny Fields**

The basic structure of staff thinking:
- connected to student background
- rural context
- influenced by seasons as children are influenced by physical, physiological, emotional and cognitive change
- links between past, present and future
- geographically situated
- the figures are linked as if the learning journey is undertaken together – teachers and students in partnership
- all figures are planted firmly on the ground while reaching upward
- hope, opportunity growing

*school vision*

Growing Beautiful Futures...

IN THE VALLEY OF OPPORTUNITIES

Visual interpretations:
- strong upward direction of line indicating growth
- solid section of the trunk indicates the support given by parents and teachers who together create the boundaries of the form
- the school environment provides a canopy of protection
- the symbolism of human shapes holding hands comes from the original school emblem
- the warmth of the soil rising into the brightness of the day gives a sense of energy, inspiration and thinking about the future

**Rich-metaphor**
bright,
warm,
welcoming,
layers of meaning,
transferable to many contexts,
situated in context,
visual, metaphorical,
reflective
of intent and
aspirations,
points to the future,
child friendly,
open ended,
action based,
oriented to
'whole child',
owned

**B.U.D.S.**

Be honest & responsible
Use respect
Do your best
Show care, understanding & fairness

Growing Smarter

AT Sunny Fields SS

We Work S.M.A.R.T. together Using Teaching and Learning That Is:

**S** Social, Supportive, Structured, Student-Centred
**M** Multi-age, Multiple Intelligences
**A** Active, Artistic, Aiming High, Achievement
**R** Routines, Risk-Taking, Resilience
**T** Teams, Technology, Thinking skills

**BUDS values:**
- values for the present and the future
- active verbs
- a sense of equity
- students show real comprehension of how these values apply to them in day to day situations
- four letters and their associations are easy to remember
- students enjoy creating meaning through art
- a sense of identity and belonging through using a common language and the drawing of students in uniform
- students are 'together' in their learning surrounded by bright happy colours and beautiful surroundings
- care and pride in the completed work
- work valued and on display

**SMART Schoolwide Pedagogy:**
- linked to growing
- simple easy to remember words
- visual reminder for students and teachers
- useful for supply teachers
- surrounded by BUDS (sunflowers)
- covers social, cognitive, age related, learning styles, high expectations, future needs to deal with change and technology
- immediately visible to visitors to the school
- could be used as a framework for reflection

**What about the other schools?**

The strong sense of history at Sunny Fields was echoed at St. Monica's with their own long history being linked to the establishment of the school by Mercy Sisters, and their place within the Catholic community. The Principal sees the words of their vision as "connecting to spirituality and the past" as the vision was based on the parting words of the last Mercy Sister to lead the school. The Teacher Leader states that "parents relate to the KITES metaphor and our vision as being connected to our spiritual roots".

At Forrester Hill the school community had only a short history. Even then, the metaphorical image of the Jacaranda tree was the one symbol or link to the past that parents were saying "we don't want to lose the tree, we don't care what else you change". It was part of the school emblem and the trees adorning the grounds reminded parents of the working bees and fun that had been had as the school grounds were being established.

At times the rhetoric around the need for change entails concepts such as "don't look back" and "look to the future", whereas this data shows that looking to the future does not necessarily mean discarding the most treasured aspects of the past. Each of these communities had some aspect of their heritage that was treasured. A characteristic of IDEAS schools is that the process itself helps school communities to identify their connectedness to some aspect of their past, thereby demonstrating respect for the thoughts and actions which have preceded the present. These treasured memories, symbols, pictures, mottos, or structures form the foundations for 'futures' thinking to take place (Crowther et al., 2002). When the data from the three schools were combined in this manner Indicator of Essence 3 emerged.

> **Indicator of Essence 3: Building the present on the past while heading for the future**
>
> There was a sense of the blending of past and present as it became obvious that history lived in the minds and hearts of each of these school communities.

## 4.6 Completion of Phase 1: The *space into 'Place'* filter
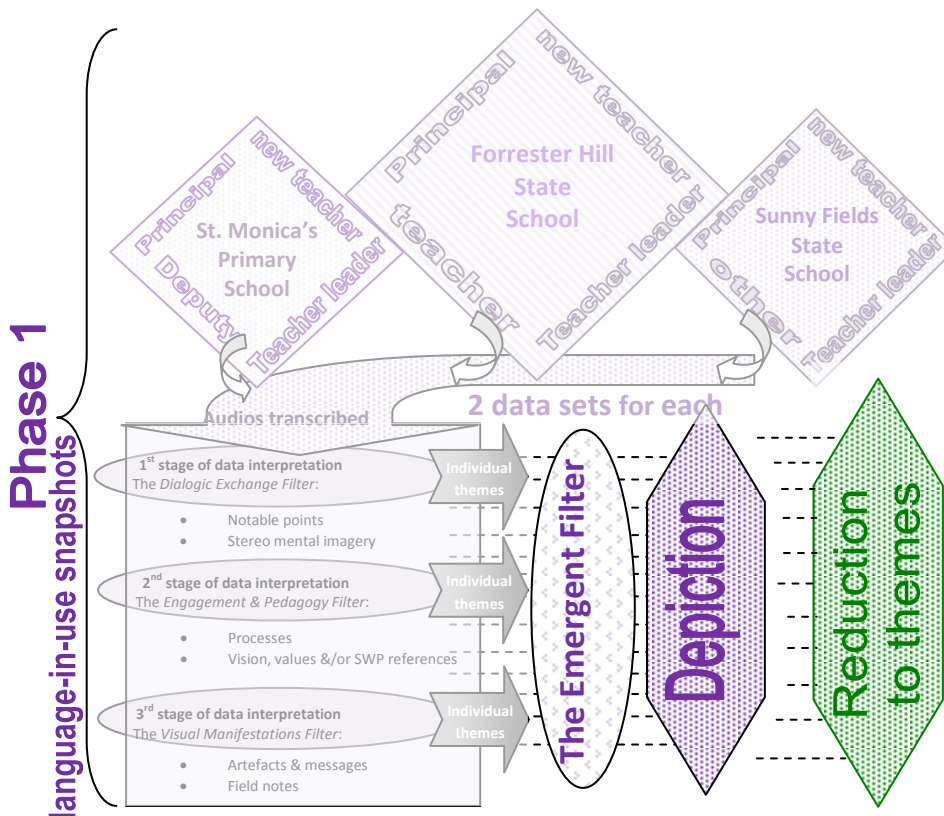


Figure 4.3 The emergent filter. The emergent filter was unknown at the commencement of this research. There may have been three or more or none at all that emerged. What did emerge was the space into 'Place' Filter.

Soon after commencing analysis of the Sunny Fields data (using the three originally defined filters), I moved on to analysing the Forrester Hill State School data. In the process of doing so another facet to the analysis came into being. The first (and in the end the only) Emergent Filter was able to be identified as the *space into 'Place' Filter.* I returned to view Sunny Fields' data through the emergent filter and then applied it to the other schools' data sets. It was during the application of this last filter that there was a distinct blurring of the edges between where depiction ended and reduction commenced.

This filter moved the concept of data analysis into that of data interpretation (in alignment with a hermeneutic perspective), due mainly to the changes in school culture evident before, during and after completion of the formal IDEAS project. When searching for ways of interpreting chronologically the changing mental models and differing ways of acting, it had become apparent that certain 'spaces' had

become 'Places' of meaning for school staff. As I reread each of the transcripts it appeared to be the 'mental stereo imagings' which were the key to creating a summary of each school's chronological progression to improvement. The 'mental stereo imagings' were revisited and placed into a collation of Past, Transition and Present references to explore their evolution and colour coded according to the capacities being identified. Forrester Hill's example of this collation can be seen in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5 Mental stereo imagery indicating changes over time at Forrester Hill**

| Principal | Teacher | Teacher Leader | New Teacher |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Past:** *Became Principal at Forrester Hill three years after the process began (came from an IDEAS school)* lost at sea someone who was lost | **Past:** *A teacher at the school throughout the entire process but never part of the IDEAS management team* getting nowhere did not talk at deep level stayed in my hole survive a day at a time | **Past:** *Became IDEAS facilitator in the second year of our journey. School lost Principal, the deputy and the registrar all in the same term.* add-ons & overload sapping energy retreated into blame no real sense of direction power groups | **Past:** *Skye has only been at the school for 12 weeks so when she talks past she means when she first came to the school. So her past is really her transition.* |
| **Transition:** reignite the dialogue supporting staff to grow | **Transition:** big learning curve dreaming phase out of comfort zone ignited a passion building collegial understandings | **Transition:** powerful catalyst a clearer internal language system | **Transition:** struggling with finding a niche it could have been hard to break into but it wasn't. |
| **Present:** embrace what needs to be done work their way through slowly layering change teaching stronger seek deep understanding allows them to not be overloaded PODS made the connections embrace the opportunities members of a team equal footing live our values part of a team run their own show take control | **Present:** centred on (student) learning clear boundaries & roles it's all there bar the kitchen sink roles and responsibilities basic groundwork targeting needs on the same page we're a learning community we can cater for individual children opportunities to grow open door policy team player | **Present:** infectious commitment deep conversations silence is confronting been a catalyst 'Gift' time safety net support one step ahead of the agenda a sound relationships base Vision, values and SWP connect us as a community Strong relationships are the foundations use my talents | **Present:** real direction the team they're not getting bombarded the school is going ahead I found a niche so quickly a place for me a real feeling of I can the mood of the school the big picture things teachers feel so empowered that feeds down to the students a language.full of possibilities |

Legend: Relating colour coding to types of capacity
Pink -references to building social capacity
Green – references to collective commitment (as a sub-set of social capacity)
Yellow – references to intellectual capacity
Turquoise – references to parallel leadership capacity
Grey – references to common goals and expectations

Taking each chronological stage at Forrester Hill by itself and combining each with the role perspectives made apparent the change from a space of low congeniality to a 'Place' of collective commitment, energy and positivity. Excerpt 4.11 has been taken from the original collation in order to demonstrate these two extremes as seen through the eyes of the Forrester Hill staff indicated by (P) for Principal, (T) for Teacher, (TL) for Teacher Leader and (NT) for New Teacher.

**Excerpt 4.11 Mental Stereo Imaging at Forrester Hill**

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**Past:** All mental 'stereo imaging' references from staff at the school over the long term has negative overtones – there is a sense that the staff were lost, there was little energy, collegiality, or common understanding of what to do.

Sense of being lost:
- lost at sea (P)
- not really getting anywhere (T)
- someone who was lost (P)
- lost direction (TL)

No common understandings:
- we didn't seem to know how to get somewhere (T)
- no real sense of direction (TL)

Lack of spark or energy to make things better:
- add-ons and overload sapping energy (TL)
- stayed in my hole (T)
- it was enough just to survive one day at a time (T)

Little collegiality:
- did their own thing (T)
- we did not talk at a deep level (T)
- power groups (TL)
- retreating to a world of blame (TL)

**Present:** At the time that the data were collected a transformation had taken place within the Forester Hill community and the 'mental stereo imaging' clearly reflects this change.

A sense of empowerment:
- embrace what needs to be done (P)
- creating opportunities (T)
- one step ahead of the agenda (TL)
- teachers feel so empowered/ a real feeling of I can (NT)

A vibrant learning community has been established:
- teaching stronger/seeking deeper understanding (P)
- centred on student learning/ we're a learning community (T)
- commitment is infectious (TL)
- the language is very positive/ full of possibilities (NT)

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Placing the 'mental stereo imagings' into a time frame identified the type of changes that had occurred within the school. Referring back to the colour coding in Table 4.4 it could be seen that school capital had been accumulated over the years of Forrester Hill's journey towards school improvement. Social capacity (highlighted in pink), intellectual capacity (highlighted in yellow) and leadership capacity (highlighted in turquoise) had all grown. Participants felt that there now exited a stronger sense of purpose and direction (highlighted in grey). The significant evolution from the discordant community to the positive and open nature of the present day workplace is valued, as are the strong relationships (both highlighted in pink as part of social capacity) across the school community. The school had moved forward. Staff now spoke as if the place where real understanding occurred within their school was continually present as shared mental models. It was at this point that acceptance of the Emergent Filter being *space into 'Place'* was both justified and confirmed.

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*The space into 'Place' filter was certainly not one that had been thought of at the beginning. It emerged when participants talked deeply about shared understanding – how and where it occurred and how there had been changes made over their "IDEAS journey". I decided to investigate what there was to know about this concept and if the present research knowledge was reflected in what had emerged. Perhaps there may be different nuances to discover or other facets of space into 'Place' to be searched for.*

*After discussion with colleagues possessing knowledge of this field I turned firstly to the work of Callejo Pérez, Fain, and Slater (2003 ) who talk of place as the "embodiment of a purposefully created space that is a creation and enactment of the cultural and social conditions of participants" (p. 1). They speak of place also in regards to education but refer to it in an architectural sense as a neutral physical space that can purposefully be created."*

> *This space becomes place when life is entered by those who understand that place is defined by boundaries and understandings or as dispositions of potential ready to be occupied and possibly used situationally by the participants and authorities that run them" [for they believe] the nature of the space in which teaching and learning occur(s) is an important factor in shaping ...educational experience. (p. 1)*

*Callejo Perez et al., further explored the concept of space "as the place where learning happens and where the lives of student and teacher can thrive or wither – a place rich in human potential"(p. 1). This understanding of place began to resonate with at least some of what was emerging from the data. I explored further and found that Bourdieu (1997) saw schools as being spaces rich with political potential and the potential to take on different practices and even opposite practices depending upon the situation. Gupta (1992) speaks of the making of place by the creation of "structures that bind space, time, and memory in the production of location (p. 76). The more I read the more I realised that the current literature in this area was dealing with the structural domain alone, whereas my data were showing the presence of three domains of space into 'Place': physical, relational and cognitive.*

The *space into 'Place' Filter* was the final one to be applied to all school data and the timelines related to the evolutionary nature of the transformation proved to be of particular significance. They revealed that the concept of *space into 'Place'* occurred across several domains: the physical/structural domain (referred to by Bourdieu, 1997; Gupta, 1992; Perez et al., 2003); the relationships or what I have labelled as the relational domain (for at Forrester Hill it was only after the strained relationships improved that any significant change in practice could take place); and the cognitive domain (where shared mental models mapped pedagogy and practice).

To gain a thorough understanding of this filter and its three inherent domains, data extracts from each of the sites were later collated into a rough timeline with an accompanying summary of the evolution of each domain. This collation can be found in Section 4.8.

## 4.7 The Domains of Space and Place

The concept of *space into 'Place'* was a complex one and not completely clear during the Depiction Phase. However, it basically referred to where understanding occurred within each school. Both 'space' and 'Place' were manifested within the physical domain, which had a structural, architectural or environmental basis; the relational domain which could be seen in the emphasis that participants placed on trust, commitment and relationships or what Mulford (2007) refers to as social capital; and the cognitive domain evident in the changing patterns of thinking and acting within each school which can be identified as evidence of intellectual capital built (Hopkins & Hargreaves, n.d.; LRI, 2011).

For each of the data sites the starting point for their IDEAS journey was different:

- At **Sunny Fields** collective understanding took place within the school based on the fact that with so few teachers, classroom practices could be easily viewed, however, common ways of working were primarily related to behaviour management, administrative requirements, the local news and little else.

  *There was this us and them scenario at the beginning. The community just did not seem to trust what was happening in the school.* (Principal)

- At **Forrester Hill** Primary School prior to engaging with the IDEAS process little collective understanding took place within the school – understandings were related to behaviour management, administrative requirements and little else. It was not a happy school and 'blame' was attributed to students, parents, the department, the Principal and other staff members.

  *School was an unhappy place to be. Teachers regularly retreated into a world of blame... We were lost but we didn't seem to know how to get out of the hole we were in.* (Teacher)

- At **St. Monica's** collective understanding about teaching and learning were present but at a superficial level – understandings were related to behaviour management, administrative requirements and the need to teach the Catholic Faith as part of the curriculum. (A common uniting factor for the whole community was commitment to the Catholic faith.)

  *We've always been a congenial staff – united through our faith.* (Assistant Principal)
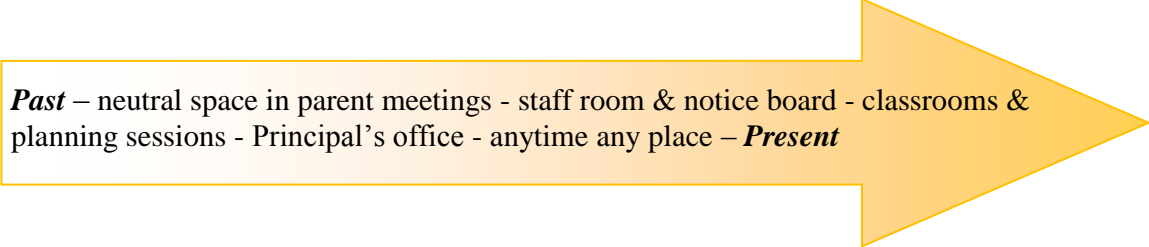
In 4.7.1 each of the domains is explored from an historical perspective. Within each school there has been movement forward in each of the domains related to space into 'Place', as indicated by the large underlying arrow. Within each arrow the wording should be read from left to right and down the page. The references to both past and present are words taken from at least one of the participant transcripts from each school site. The first words to indicate the past are the starting point within each continuum and relate to space. The references to the present conclude each arrowed continuum and are indicative of current 'Place'. Once placed into each continuum, understandings related to another Indicator of Essence emerged. Each site seemed to reveal part of the next essence indicator rather than the whole picture at once.

## 4.7.1 Exploring the physical domain

At **Sunny Fields** there was little need for neutral space between staff as the small group had close connections from the beginning. Community links were not as strong. The historically proven priorities and ways of doing things were hard to break

down (change was not highly regarded), so neutral space in parent meetings needed to be established.

*Physical space into 'Place' Continuum (Linked to strengthening community ties):*

*Past* – neutral space in parent meetings - staff room & notice board - classrooms & planning sessions - Principal's office - anytime any place – *Present*

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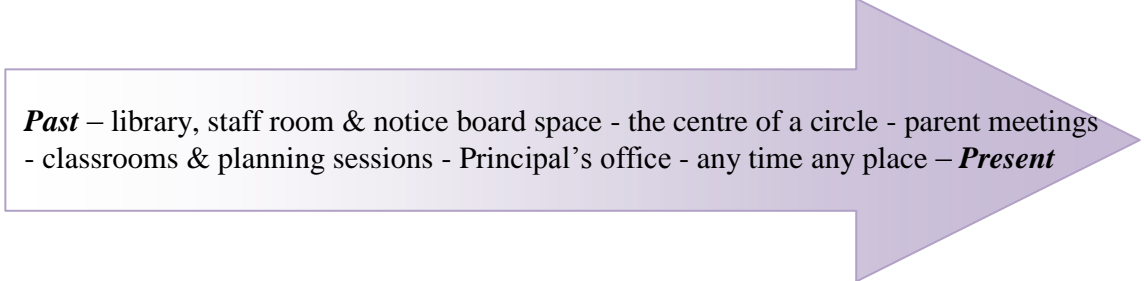
**Indicator of Essence 4 (a): Evolving space into 'Place'**

Creating neutral physical space for school-community connections was necessary at the beginning. Once congenial space was established whole school community place quickly evolved into a place of engagement and then into limitless place.

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At **Forrester Hill** throughout the IDEAS journey, the physical place where understanding took place grew from limited neutral (controlled) space to unlimited (varied) place once the IDEAS protocols of 'teachers are the key', 'no blame', 'success breeds success' and 'professional learning' were accepted.

The dedication of time to teacher leaders in charge of establishing and supporting 'Place' was necessary at the beginning of the IDEAS journey but became less of a conscious act as parallel leadership capacity and collective commitment grew. With the expansion of 'Place' the four walls of the classroom began to dissolve.

*Physical space into 'Place' Continuum (Safe places to help build relationships):*
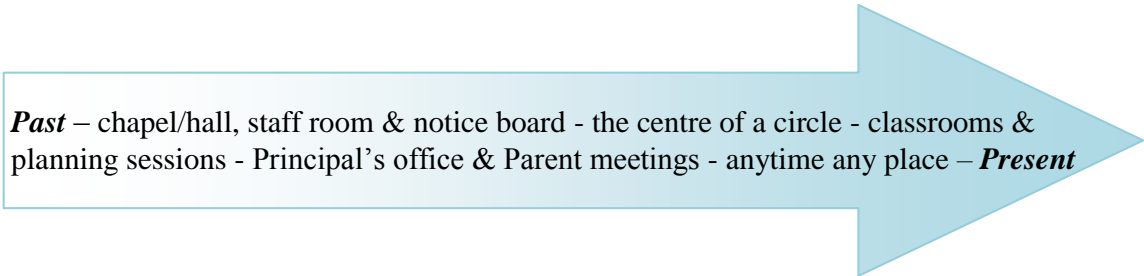
*Past* – library, staff room & notice board space - the centre of a circle - parent meetings - classrooms & planning sessions - Principal's office - any time any place – *Present*

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**Indicator of Essence 4(b): Evolving Space into 'Place'**

The evolution of limited shared space into a place of engagement took time but once established and supported by teacher leadership, limitless place quickly eventuated.

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At **St. Monica's** there was little need for neutral physical space. Even though this was the case, there was not really a place where teachers engaged in professional conversations and the sharing of practice. The 'Skilful Discussion Circle' was a useful facilitation tool in this regard.

*Physical space into 'Place' Continuum* (Linked to commitment and faith):

*Past* – chapel/hall, staff room & notice board - the centre of a circle - classrooms & planning sessions - Principal's office & Parent meetings - anytime any place – *Present*

**Indicator of Essence 4 (c): Evolving Space into 'Place'**

Creating neutral physical space was unnecessary. The evolution of shared-faith place into a place of engagement still required some time but once 'hierarchical' conceptions of roles began to dissolve and leadership became shared, limitless place quickly emerged.

Although each perspective and each starting point was different within each school it was clear that the physical domain of the *space into 'Place'* filter was an important one to consider**.**

## 4.7.2 Exploring the relational domain

At **Sunny Fields** the small staff numbers and closely connected classrooms had meant that staff knew each other's practices well. The need to build social (relational) capacity was primarily between parents and staff, as many parents with historical connections with this school felt they should be the ones to determine what happened within the school.

The role played by one teacher aide (a long standing member of this rural community) was of particular significance, as her close community connections helped to bring relationships closer together and she also took on a parallel leadership role as a facilitator of the school improvement process.

*Relationships space into 'Place' Continuum (Creating connections to community):*

*Past* – neutral space (building positive relationships with community) - shared leadership transforming relational place - unconditional relational place - (acknowledging and respecting individuality and professionalism) – *Present*

**Indicator of essence 5 (a) Risk-taking is fed by trust therefore school improvement is fed by trust.**

The move from staff congenial relationships into risk-taking collegial relationships was furthered by changing leadership roles and strengthened community connections.

At **Forrester Hill** before any progress towards school improvement could be made social capital had to be accumulated. Trust, respect and a commitment to suspend judgments and pre-conceptions was mandatory before the school could move forward. Part of this lack of social capital was related to difficult relationships between the principal leader and key staff members. The establishment of shared leadership and a 'no blame' environment were of paramount importance in triggering movement forward. Relationships of acceptance slowly evolved into relationships of trust and then quickly 'morphed' again into collegial professional relationships.

*Relational space into 'Place': (Creating connections with colleagues)*

*Past* – neutral space (dissolving of power bases) - congenial space (acknowledge & respect others) - collegial place (celebrating individuality & professionalism) – *Present*
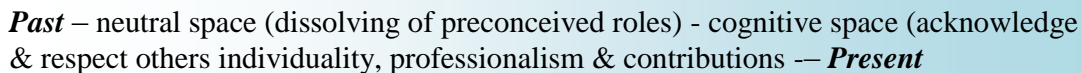
**Indicator of Essence 5 (b): Risk-taking is fed by trust therefore school improvement is fed by trust.**

The move from careful constrained relationships into risk-taking collegial relationships takes time and is facilitated by protocols of engagement that build trust.

At **St. Monica's** although social relational space was well established staff were reluctant to let go of the old hierarchical model of leadership. The building of parallel

leadership capacity took time but then spread to the majority of staff with parents also taking on improvement centred leadership roles.

***Relationships space into 'Place'*** *(realigning relationships):*

***Past*** *– neutral space (dissolving of preconceived roles) - cognitive space (acknowledge & respect others individuality, professionalism & contributions -–* ***Present***

---

**Indicator of Essence 5 (c) Risk-taking is fed by trust therefore school improvement is fed by trust.**

The move from accepting hierarchical relationships to the development of parallel leadership and collective risk-taking shared collegial relationships was enabled teachers to share practice and take on parallel leadership roles.

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## 4.7.3 Exploring the cognitive domain

As the physical and relational space morphed into 'Place' the three domains became tightly interwoven. The evolution of *space into 'Place'* within the cognitive domain occurred as both individual and collective intellectual capacity expanded. The richness of the data related to the changing mental maps that were evolving could not be captured within a simple arrowed continuum as had been adequate with the other two domains. Thus the cognitive domain of *space into 'Place'* was explored using quotes taken directly from the transcripts. (At the same time as presenting the transcript extracts for the purpose of clarifying *space into 'Place'* I have placed in blue sections of the data which point to the next Indicator of Essence.)

> *The understanding that takes place is in our common language about how and what we teach* – *and why. You only realise how far you have come in that department when you have to leave a plan for a relief teacher. It is really hard to do now. We've done so much together – a lot of PD and a lot of talking and exploring and that's built our pedagogical framework but that is a lot for a supply teacher to understand.* (Principal Sunny Fields)

*I remember when we first started to talk about Productive Pedagogies and Multiliteracies ...everyone was complaining, including myself, it was a lot of work and we did not have a common language and we did not understand the language being used and it was a big learning curve. But it made a big difference because from that we developed our own language, a shared language related to teaching and learning, it also gave a focus to concentrate on -– we were all focussed on improving literacy results and I think that was probably the start of us becoming a learning community.*(Teacher Forrester Hill)

*Initially we did not really have a shared language even of what our values meant. It was only through the process of really talking about it and having some discussion that brought us closer together in our thinking and understanding of what innovation should look like in the classroom. That took us a long time. In that time we did a lot of journaling – we did a lot of reflection. Pedagogical deepening has to really come after when you have your vision and you have your principles of practice and you share understandings about these.*
(Teacher Leader St. Monica's)

With the growth of positive relationships and a willingness to share and take risks when expressing opinions came a collective commitment to school improvement. The removal of relationships based prejudices (in the case of Forester Hill), community generated bias (in the case of Sunny Fields), and hierarchical role related preconceptions (in the case of St. Monica's), facilitated the sharing of practices, deeply held values and beliefs, and leadership roles across the whole school community.

*The aides, especially J…, also know the pedagogies we share across the school because they were part of the development of these – part of the conversations that were carried out on an ongoing basis. J… can run this school when she has to – that was never more obvious than last year when I had leave and M... was sick and suddenly there were 2 teachers who did not know the students or the way we did things around here. Without J…'s knowledge and level of confidence the school would have*

*fallen in a heap. Mind you she was awfully pleased when M…was better and I returned from leave.* (Principal Sunny Fields)

*There's lots of great things that happen at Forrester Hill – there are lots of ah-ha moments but … the one in particular that I am thinking of at present is when I went for my job interview and being able to get each member of staff to do a 360 on me and that was part of my presentation – part of my interview. In the end I thought it was the most powerful part of that and that was a learning community that wanted to retain and build on what we had … that came through in what was written… they genuinely wanted to give feedback for me as a leader to help me learn about my strengths as a leader.*(Principal Forrester Hill)

*There's been a change in culture here this year. Teachers hadn't been initiating notions and ideas, you know, journeys themselves. But they're starting to…I think that they're starting to see the big picture. They are starting to think about the sorts of decisions they make in terms of not only their classrooms but a wider picture, so if we're talking about an event in the school we are talking about how that fits with what we're looking at altogether.* (Principal St. Monica's)

At first it was the development of individual cognitive space that encouraged teachers to become teacher leaders. As school data were shared (initially that of the Diagnostic Inventory data) professional conversations took place and clear individual understandings flowed into shared understandings regarding the need for change. Cognitive place had been established. There was a symbiotic relationship between the individual and collective forms of intelligence as characterised in the transcripts. At times individuals led the changes in collective understandings and at others collectively generated understandings evolved into individuals altering their thinking and then their practices. This double-loop learning cycle is captured in Appendix J.

*The only thing you can really do is keep improving your pedagogies…it's the only way forward…and I mean that's what all of IDEAS is about ultimately as well…and…whole school alignment, so you're developing some consistent messages across your school. High expectations underpins everything because we realise we need to meet our*

*expectations if the children are to reach a better standard then what they're doing. So to translate that to NAPLAN, to get the kids up to another band we have to raise our expectations too. We talked about how that's in little everyday things and not just successful tasks or projects – it's the everyday things.* (Teacher Leader Sunny Fields)

*I think it is when we are at our most frustrated – when you think "I just cannot take any more of this – I don't agree, they're not listening" or "It's too much, it's too big I don't understand why they're asking me to do this!" I think that is when we really kind of step back and have a look at what has been asked of us at our principles and then what we must ask of ourselves and it's then that we go – Oh yeh! That's what needs to be done.* (Teacher Forrester Hill)

*People are willing to have the conversations and are willing to reflect both as individuals and within their teams, they're willing to look at change to adapt to and work together in an effort to improve learning for our kids. The parents also like the fact that they have a voice too – they are a part of the learning and invited in to see what is going on.* (New Teacher St. Monica's)

Participants indicated that collective cognitive capacity evolved into a powerful change catalyst aligning practices and expanding the circle of pedagogical influence resulting in more staff members coming 'on board' the school improvement journey. This cognitive place was built on a shared meaning system and contextually constructed language. This was manifested in each school as a metaphorically-rich vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical framework kept 'alive' through a continual cycle of reflection, authentication, improvement and reinforcement.

*Since we wrote our SWP we already need to deliberately change it as – since then we have done our literacy training and that has given us new knowledge and greater insights into the best way to teach certain aspects of the essentials and how to look at texts both verbal and visual. We need*

*to capture exactly what we mean – we have said our kids like structure and routine but what exactly did we mean by that?* (Principal Sunny Fields)

*Our pedagogical principles are in everything -– substantive conversations are a good start – we have them all the time and we encourage them. They (the pedagogical principles) are in our planning, our behaviour management, the way we talk to everybody – it's just who we are. Embedding that takes time and then we decide we need to add to what we have – so now I'm still getting my head around the whole thing when we are planning. But the Jacaranda Tree is a very powerful metaphor for us… it helps to make the connections.* (New Teacher Forrester Hill)

*I think the kites made things very clear for me and it fits in nicely with the culture of the school and 'cos it's situated on the hill. Breaking it down for the children has been easy 'cos they really connect with it.* [She mentions the words of the acronym and what they mean] *that was easy for me I think. It is good for the kids too as you have a fairly big range within the class the gifted and talented down to your special needs kiddies and they all can relate to it.* (New Teacher St. Monica's)

The cognitive evolution of *space into 'Place'* was clearly evident within the mental models illustrated by these extracts.

## 4.7.4 Summary of *space into 'Place'* significance

At Forrester Hill, school leaders had to consciously create a neutral space where differences could be aired in a no blame environment. However, even at St. Monica's leaders of the school improvement process 'set the scene' for collegial discussions by placing seating in a circle and reinforced ways of interacting with the use of visual reminders. Relationships building of various sorts moved teacher discussion into the realm of professional conversation, bringing with it the formation of shared mental maps.

The application of the *space into 'Place'* filter had seen the following interpretations come to light:

- When relationships are strengthened by a culture of trust and 'no blame' then individual cognitive space expands and so does commitment and the willingness to share deeply held opinions.

- Cognitive place is explicitly evidenced as a common meaning system and a framework of shared pedagogical understandings. It evolves from the conscious sharing and valuing of individual practice, recognition of 'expert' practice and a collective commitment to improving practice.

- Cognitive space lies within an individual while cognitive place lies within a collective professional community and the shared mental maps they create. It is nurtured through professional conversations and thrives via constant reflection focussed on school improvement.

An additional insight from Forrester Hill data is worth noting as they have been sustaining their commitment to school improvement for over eight years. I had written in my journal these words from the teacher at Forrester Hill:

> *The other day the student leadership team was talking to me about a couple of our new kids and mentioned that they "just didn't seem to get it". I asked what they meant and they talked of the values and vision words did not have any meaning for them yet. After a bit of brainstorming they reckoned it was because since our music teacher had left there had been no singing of 'our songs' on parade – so what we just took for granted was harder for 'new' kids to remember. That was a great insight by the student team and we have reintroduced our songs now.*

The Principal at Sunny Fields also talks about having to "*maintain the narrative so we don't lose what we've got*".

---

**Indicator of Essence 6: A contextually created language is an artefact of cognitive place**

Cognitive place is manifested as a contextually created language-in-use that is embedded in the fabric of school life to the point where those new to the school use the language of the shared mental maps without necessarily being aware of their origins. Such a language should not be taken for granted or it may be lost.

---

# 4.8 Summarising the Evolution of *space into 'Place'*

Montage 4.3 was designed to pull together *space into 'Place'* interpretations into a summary of findings consisting of overlapping planes representative of the chronological evolution of *space into 'Place'* within the three domains. Due to the alignment between the data site schools, a combined montage was created. This re-emphasised that within the interpretation process, elements of the Reduction Phase (where holistic understandings were sought) had already begun to take over from the Depiction Phase.

Within Montage 4.3 there is acknowledgement that each of the schools started from a different space before the merging of characteristics and the fundamental nature of *space into 'Place'* emerged. Very roughly this occurred over a three to five year period, with the difference in time being directly related to the relationships starting point.

Within Montage 4.3 it can be seen that Forrester Hill had the furthest distance to travel before significant evolution of *space into 'Place'* transpired, as congenial relationships had to be established first. Sunny Fields had less of a distance to travel though they still needed to build relationships with their community, and St. Monica's had the least distance to travel, as relationships strengthened by shared faith were already strong. However, once neutral space was established within all schools the progression from *space into 'Place'* was relatively the same.

**Summarising the current 'Place' where understandings occur**

Montage 4.3 captures the physical, relational and cognitive, characteristics of present 'Place' as it evolved over a three to five year time frame. The time frame seems largely dependent on the differing starting points that existed around community and/or staff relationships. The strong collegial and community relationships that currently exist within each school has seen the need for a specific physical space or place diminish and instead, for these participants, meaningful conversations take place 'any time, any place and with anyone'. Each of the participants from these schools appear to possesses a shared mental model of their school as a learning community built on the foundations of a no blame environment.

**Montage 4.3 Evolution of *space into 'Place'***

# Past Transition

## PRESENT

### 3-5 year period →

**Differing starting points**

**created shared space**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Neutral** | **Emerging** | **Embedded** |

**Forrester Hill**

Limited neutral space:

- Library
- Staffroom
- Noticeboard

**Further to travel**

**Physical Space**
- professional conversations circle
- visually reinforced space

- staffroom
- classrooms
- planning sessions
- principal's office
- visually reinforced

**Physical Place**
- Anytime
- Any place
- With any one

**Relational Space**
- congenial
- dissolved power/role bases
- celebrate success
- IDEAS protocols

- collegial respect
- parallel leadership
- celebrated strengths
- shared language

**Relational Place**

- Learning community
- No blame environment
- Double-loop learning
- Commitment to supporting others
- Shared pedagogy
- Contextually specific language-in-use

**St. Monica's**

No need of neutral space

**Not far to travel**

**Cognitive Space**
- remove pre-conceptions
- Diagnostic Inventory exploration
- focus on student need
- share pedagogy

- Individual & collective meaning making
- sharing pedagogy
- professional conversations
- data led decisions
- agreed Vision/values
- evolving pedagogical language

**Cognitive Place**

**Sunny Fields**

Partial neutral space:

- Staffroom
- Classrooms

- Collegial
- Risk-taking
- Collaborative planning
- Ownership of outcomes

Through processes of on-going individual and collective reflection, double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974) has taken place and changes in practice have occurred in order to enhance student outcomes. These teachers and leaders demonstrate commitment to supporting others in the learning process and thus school intellectual capital is constantly being built. The shared mental models associated with these high levels of intellectual capital have certain characteristics in common: shared pedagogical understandings built on schoolwide pedagogical principles; a contextually specific language-in-use that allows shared understandings to be created; collegial risk taking supported by metastrategic leadership; collaborative planning; and the collective ownership of school outcomes.

## 4.9 The Final Depictions
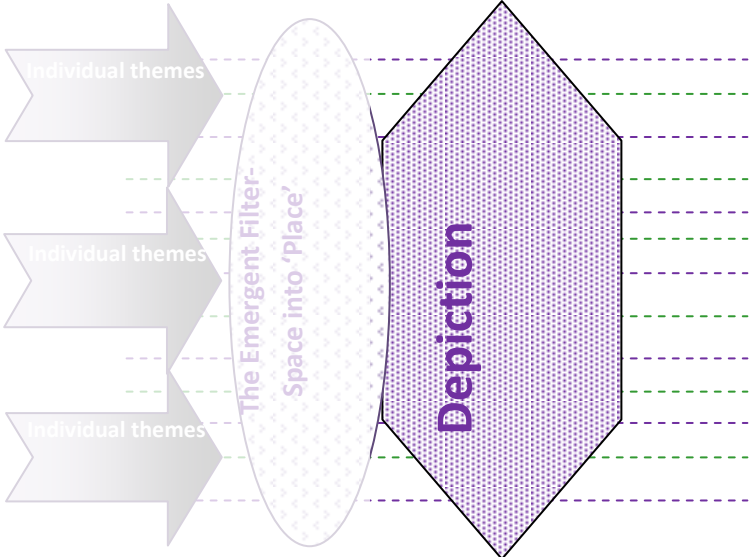


Figure 4.4 The final depictions

In Figure 4.4 it can be seen that all interpretations, once viewed through *the space into 'Place' filter*, were then represented as a final depiction for each school. The depth of meaning embedded in the language-in-use within these schools, and the inherent meaning of the mental stereo imagining, required a combined representation. Therefore a 'Montage of Meaning' specific to each site was created to reflect the significant aspects taken from the descriptions, 'Snapshots', tables,

excerpts and verbal interpretations that had appeared after utilisation of the four filters. These represent the final stage of the Depiction Phase within *The Phases and Flow Model* (Figure 3.3).

## 4.9.1 Sunny Fields: The final depiction

Sunny Fields is a school which is very much a part of its rural environment. Its connectedness to the land and the images of growth and the creation of rich fertile learning experiences that engage students, permeate the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical framework proudly displayed and developed by the whole school community. At first the current Principal had found relationships between the school and its community were strained and there was little collaboration between both. Relationships between the community and the teachers have moved a long way from this tentative beginning and now energies are combined to focus on better outcomes for students rather than possible differences in points of view.

The SMART pedagogy was written with the Sunny Fields student cohort in mind. These are students who need active hands-on learning experience and planning which caters for all the abilities and age levels inherent within small multi-age classrooms. Students are actively involved in tutoring their peers and being responsible for the learning of others. They take pride in explaining their learning to their parents and acting out their learning for other age groups. There is an openness and melding of learning approaches and teaching strategies used within the three classrooms. The links and progressions between the three are clearly identified which is why the 'chain effect' has been utilised in Montage 4.4. Parallel leadership thrives in its truest sense with any one person in the team (teacher or teacher aide) being capable and willing to 'step up' when needed.

**Montage 4.4 Sunny Fields Depiction**

# Growing beautiful futures...

partnerships

hands on

Sunny Fields has strong links to its agricultural community with its past & present closely linked by position, family & the cycles of seasons.

Valuing others' contributions and 'letting go' of preconceptions was necessary before the community could move forward.

## growth

Parallel leadership acquires a new meaning in this context as the small school setting means that all staff must help in the grounds, with sport, maintaining equipment and supervising learning. When the principal is absent another can 'take their place' including the teacher aide. Staff seem to read each other's minds at times.

This small rural school has families with strong beliefs in past 'ways of working' as well as new 'town' families prepared and willing to commit to something other than what was. Relationships between school and community are of the utmost importance and the blending of views took time.

leading

active

Evolution from space into place at Sunny Fields required commitment to documentation built on deep reflection and the need to share complex understandings with others.

Staff alignment of practice required clear documentation of shared understandings of quality pedagogical practices that worked for these students in their context. These students needed hands-on learning and integrated learning across multiple year levels. Creating, exploring, 'doing' is what it is all about.

## ...in the valley of opportunities

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## 4.9.2 Forrester Hill: The final depiction

The Forrester Hill story is one of transformation from a disconnected community to one where the school's strong vision, values and pedagogical framework guide collective decision making and practice. The Jacaranda tree imagery is a powerful one originating from the parents' strong desire to maintain this 'historical' image as a central focus for the new direction that the school was taking. It took time to develop the necessary social capital (trust and quality relationships) which allowed intellectual capital to be built (professional thinking and acting).

Leadership capacity in staff and students was and is consciously built by the parallel leadership team – particularly the metastrategic principal. There have been many changes to staff personnel and embedded practices have to be continually revisited, updated and re-articulated. The journey has been a long one and in order to keep the vibrancy and strength that has developed over the years at Forrester Hill, there has been a conscious effort to 'induct' newcomers into the school – families and staff.

Students identify strongly with the image of the tree and its PODS. Celebrating PODS behaviours means celebrating student achievement in the areas of practising safety, overall respect, demonstrating learning and showing responsibility. As depicted within the Forrester Hill montage (Montage 4.5), the metaphor of the Jacaranda tree is unmistakenly embedded within the texts of the school.

The visual Jacaranda tree metaphor relates to both the vision and the school's schoolwide pedagogy and is reinforced in every aspect of school life. A social skilling program written by school community members in 2006 has grown and morphed over the years and is now known as the Vision Program. A vision banner greets visitors as they enter the school. The Vision and Values Songs (see Appendix F for the words of these songs) hold real significance for students. As identified by the teacher at Forrester Hill in 2010, it became apparent that some new students to the school could not relate to the vision in the same ways as had occurred in the past. The student leadership team quickly identified that it was because the songs were no longer being sung on parade. As a result of listening to student voice the musical metaphors are again in use.

**Montage 4.5 Forrester Hill Depiction**

# Growing together-learning forever

At Forrester Hill the links made through visuals, verbal imagery and metaphor tie the community together. From out of a 'season of discontent' grew the seed of a Jacaranda Tree. This tree symbol meant a great deal to the parents of the school and now means a great deal to all. The rich metaphor gave new life and meaning and helped the pieces to fit together. Now it continues to maintain and strengthen community bonds.

time

## The community has moved so far...

community values

relationships

Complexity (clientele, special needs, position, and socio-economic demographics) valued.

rich understandings
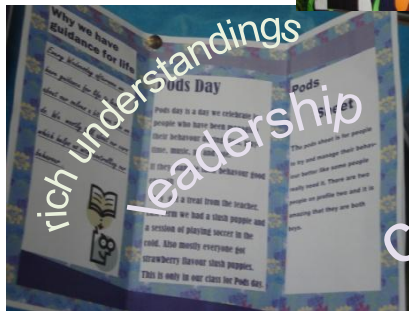
leadership

**Relationships matter - No Blame – shared pedagogy – parallel leadership**

commitment

one step ahead

From feeling 'lost at sea' the school community now has focus and purpose. There is a sense of empowerment that staff feel particularly when they look back at where they came from and celebrate the distance travelled. The sense of being on a journey that never ends is strong. Change is embraced and 'over load' is avoided by the strong sense of professional community and that support is always at hand.

**Growing Together - Learning Forever**

**Vision & SWP guide practice**

**Supporting Each Other**

Valuing the contributions of others and establishing a 'no blame' environment allows collective understandings to thrive. Understandings that new staff members can add value to and feel a part of.

The rich metaphor of the Jacaranda Tree has a depth of meaning that leads thinking and acting.

... prepared & capable of moving forward...

endless possibilities

### 4.9.3 St. Monica's: The final depiction

St. Monica's montage is designed to depict vibrancy, commitment to cultural diversity and devotedness to faith. From the beginning teacher relationships were congenial and teachers showed concern for the children in their care. However, now staff embrace the need to be ongoing learners themselves. The four walls of the classroom are dissolving as teachers willingly share practice and areas of expertise. Parallel leadership has been embraced by the majority of staff members as many wish to contribute to the journey. A journey these participants saw as being led by the KITES soaring upward and onward.

The widely shared language of staff, parents and students facilitates deep reflection on thinking and acting. Metacognition and the metacognitive emphasis evident within classrooms and staff rooms in discussions around best learning strategies and reflecting on ways of improving practice have built intellectual capital within the school. The metacognitive emphasis has been noticed by visitors to the school; such as supply teachers.

Parents expressed a strong desire to become more involved in the decision making within the school and have wholeheartedly embraced the school's new vision and KITES pedagogy. Students identify with the image of the kites and can clearly articulate how they 'fit into the picture' which is why the image of the child is positioned in the centre of Montage 4.6.

Students of all ages and abilities relate to the metaphorical image of the KITE and proudly identify themselves with it and the school. The St. Monica's Principal explained that many students consider themselves to be from 'the KITES' school. Students carry their connectedness with the vision and schoolwide pedagogy beyond school boundaries, sharing their understandings in other contexts. The language-in-use at the heart of this community echoes a culture of faith and respect, the embracing of diversity and a passion for teaching and learning improvement.

# From this hill...

St. Monica's is a close knit community with a proud heritage and strong links to their Catholic faith and traditions. Prior to engaging with IDEAS it was at this level that the community and the staff connected. Collective staff understandings took place on a superficial plane related to behaviour management, administrative needs and the need to teach the Catholic faith. Staff were congenial but rarely shared classroom practice or indeed had a shared understanding of what 'good' classroom pedagogy entailed.

The school community went on a journey and it was their vision and pedagogical framework that led the way forward. Now the school is a vibrant and passionate professional learning community with commitment to past priorities but with the additional focus of on-going school improvement. For this PLC these are not just words but a pledge of action to, and with, their students and community. Student need guides decision making and cognitive 'Place' has been established where shared understandings are evidenced in the 'language-in-use' in classrooms, the staff room, the community and the interview room — on walls, in workbooks and in hearts and minds.

...we will soar.

**K**
Knowledge - flying a kite is knowing, soaring a kite is under-standing

**I**
Innovation – you don't know where the breeze will take you

**T**
Taking Risks - by facing into the wind we can soar to great heights

**E**
Empowerment - soaring is easier when you take control of the strings

**S**
Success - soar your kite to the highest height

student centred

led by faith

pride

community voice

meta-cognition

passion

## 4.9.4 Grouping the initial 'Indicators of Essence' within the Depiction Phase

As the Depiction Phase evolved into the deduction phase, a number of 'Indicators of Essence' had surfaced. These had been identified throughout Chapter 4 by the dotted text boxes. These were brought together as the first collated indicators of the 'Essence' of the language-in-use phenomenon.

**Indicator of Essence 1: Embarking on a continuous learning journey**
There is a sense of journey uniqueness and professional learning echoed throughout the transcripts.

**Indicator of Essence 2: Sharing mental models leads to the possibility of collective action**
Repeated references to similar processes by all participants became indicators of the mental models that formed the groundwork for action within the school.

**Indicator of Essence 3: Building the present on the past**
There was a sense of the blending of past and present as it became obvious that history lived in the minds and hearts of this small close-knit rural community.

**Indicator of Essence 4: Evolving *space into 'Place'* within the domains of physical, relational and cognitive**

a)      At Forrester Hill the evolution of limited shared space into a place of engagement took time but once established and supported by parallel leadership, limitless place quickly eventuated.

b)      At St. Monica's creating neutral physical space was unnecessary. The evolution of shared-faith place into a place of engagement still required some time but once 'hierarchical' conceptions of roles began to dissolve and leadership became shared, limitless place quickly emerged.

c)      At Sunny Fields creating neutral physical space for school-community connections was necessary at the beginning. Once congenial space was

established whole school community place quickly evolved into a place of engagement and then into limitless place.

Though each context had a different path to travel, none-the-less the indicator remained true. Combined these became:

**Evolving *space into 'Place'* within the domains of physical, relational and cognitive**: *The nature of the evolution of space into "Place" for each of the contexts was a little different due to differing starting points, however, over time all contexts developed physical, relational and cognitive shared "Place".*

**Indicator of Essence 5: Risk-taking is fed by trust, therefore school improvement is fed by trust**

a)      The move from staff congenial relationships into risk-taking collegial relationships was furthered by changing leadership roles and strengthened community connections. (FH)

b)      The move from careful constrained relationships into risk-taking collegial relationships takes time and is facilitated by protocols of engagement that build trust. (SM)

c)      The move from accepting hierarchical relationships to the development of parallel leadership and collective risk-taking shared collegial relationships enabled teachers to share practice and take on parallel leadership roles. (SF, FH, SM)

The relational domain starting points differed but none-the-less the indicator remained true. Combined these became:

**School improvement is fed by trust, therefore school improvement is fed by trust**: *School improvement is built on the development of strong relationships, as trust is a fundamental component of the willingness of teachers to try new pedagogical practices and take on parallel leadership roles in an effort to improve student outcomes.*

**Indicator of Essence 6: A contextually created language is an artefact of cognitive place and cognitive place should not be taken for granted**

Cognitive place is manifested as a contextually created language-in-use that is embedded in the fabric of school life to the point where those new to the school use the language without necessarily being aware of the origins of many of its components. Such a language should not be taken for granted or it may be lost.

Applying the four filters to the data not only provided rich descriptions and montages from which initial essence indicators and a depiction of each data site emerged, they were the means of reducing the messages within the data into themes. By reviewing *The Phases and Flow Model* (Figure 3.3), the dual roles that the filters served are indicated by the parallel data lines flowing across the filters area and into the emergent filter and beyond. These dotted lines alternate between purple and green showing how Phase 3 − the Reduction Phase − had already commenced.

# CHAPTER 5 : IDENTIFYING THEMES

Emergent throughout the previous chapter were the first six 'Indicators of Essence'. What had also become apparent was that there was no clear cut delineation between where Phase 1 (the Depiction Phase) ended and Phase 2 (the Reduction Phase) began. The depiction had highlighted common understandings within the three contexts related to the concept of a learning journey; sharing mental models; respecting the past when building the future; the need to take risks in a trusting environment; and the fact that cognitive connections should not be taken for granted.

The deepening of the investigation and further clarification of 'Indicators of Essence' were left to the *Reduction Phase* where indicators and emerging themes (also indicative of essence) were examined to determine their significance. It was important to leave a deeper analysis of the essence indicators until all had been compiled, as the emphasis was on maintaining a focus on the overarching question – *What is the underlying significance of a contextually constructed language within the life-world of three Australian schools engaged with the Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievement in Schools (IDEAS) process of on-going school improvement?* – as it was the 'wholeness' of essence that was sought.

In the Reduction Phase the identification of themes served two functions:

1. New 'Indicators of Essence' come to light.

2. Potential 'Indicators of Essence' with limited support were removed.

> *It was during the Reduction Phase that Merleau-Ponty's words "the sparks of transcendence that fly up like sparks from a fire"(1964, p. xii) began to have deep meaning. Throughout this research I have continually felt that hermeneutic phenomenology had found me as much as I had found it. It became difficult to separate the researcher role from the method as I had so immersed myself in the phenomenological stance.*
>
> *Interpretation of lived experience is a very personal journey of discovery. I was sharing and interpreting the journeys of others, as they shared their interpretations with me, in a double hermeneutic manner. But none-the-less no two people will interpret an event, an action, a comment, an image in exactly the same manner. It is therefore inevitable that my interpretation of their words and where they placed their emphases of significance play a decisive role in the process of reduction from depiction. Therefore the sections of transcripts, although interpreted within context, had to be drawn out and onto the written page in order to show what the 'sparks' were that for me indicated deeper significance.*

## 5.1 Phase 2 Part A: Reduction to Themes
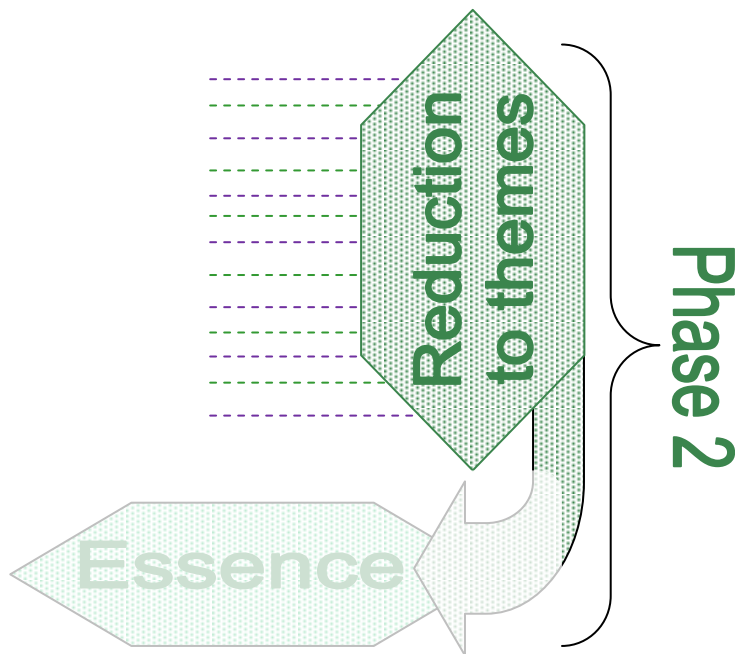


Figure 5.1 Reduction to themes

Figure 5.1 indicates the position this section of analysis (Chapter 5) holds within the overall *Phases and Flow Model* (Figure 3.3), as it only deals with Part A of the Reduction Phase. (Part B is dealt with in Chapter 6 and involved the final stages of reduction which result in the basic 'Essence' of the phenomenon emerging.) However, this initial phase of the reduction (Part A) entailed a detailed filtering process whereby data were sifted, grouped and linked to derive school and role specific themes (Figure 5.2 Steps 1 and 2). The remaining steps of determining links, both common and role specific, were used to create *'Narratives of Significance'* (Step 3). These narratives were then reflected onto the planes of the multifaceted texts (Step 4) and led to the collation of shared themes representative of additional 'Indicators of Essence' (Step 5).

The Reduction Part A

Step 1: School and role specific data compilations

Step 2: Role grouped themes

Step 3: Linking themes according to schools (common and role specific)
captured in the *'Narratives of Significance'*

Step 4: Reflecting on the themes using the plane of multifaceted texts

Step 5: Summary of shared themes from each school and articulation of any
new 'Indicators of Essence'

## Part A
### Reduction to themes

| Sunny Fields | Forrester Hill | St. Monica's |
|---|---|---|
| Role specific notable points compilations | Role specific notable points compilations | Role specific notable points compilations |

**Step 1**

**Step 2**

| Themes by Role | Themes by Role | Themes by Role |
|---|---|---|

**Step 3**

| Linking themes | Linking themes | Linking themes |
|---|---|---|

| Common | Role specific | Common | Role specific | Common | Role specific |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| narratives of significance | | narratives of significance | | narratives of significance | |

**Step 4**

| Multifaceted texts | Multifaceted texts | Multifaceted texts |
|---|---|---|

**Step 5**

### Shared themes from schools

**Additional Indicators of essence**

## Part B
### Essence

**Phase 2**

Figure 5.2 The steps within Part A of the Reduction

Examples for Step 1 from Forrester Hill, and examples from each school for Step 2,
have been used to illustrate the first two steps in the reduction process as indicated in

Figure 5.2. These steps led to linking themes being highlighted and then woven into a whole picture view as *'Narratives of Significance'* in Step 3. It was in Step 3 that the first deep layers of the reduction process unfolded. From Step 3 onward, the details of the steps taken for all schools are presented, rather than representative examples.

The *'Narratives of Significance'* explore in a hermeneutic phenomenological manner the language-in-use by each participant and the "phenomenon of the[ir] life-world" (Husserl, 1982) by "play[ing] with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection" to contribute to a greater understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, pp. 1-2). These *'Narratives of Significance'* capture unique role and contextually specific understandings which at the same time highlight the linking themes between one narrative and another.

Step 4 involved deep exploration of the multifaceted texts within Data Set 2. This was necessary in order to check for confirmation of themes derived from Step 3 and to ascertain whether these other types of texts highlighted themes which had either not been identified or had not proven to be significant up until this point. Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of the shared themes and role specific themes within each of the schools, followed by a collation of any new 'Indicators of Essence' that emerged (Step 5).

## 5.1.1 The steps taken within Part A

From the beginning of this investigation the collated notable points derived from each participant's transcript were grouped according to school (see Appendices A, B and C). An example taken from these is that of the Forrester Hill's New Teacher's most notable points which can be seen in Table 5.1. The notable points had significant processes and 'mental stereo imagings' embedded within them. Therefore it was the collations of notable points which were re-examined with a particular focus as to their role specific characteristics. The recurrent themes evident within these collations were the starting point for searching for further 'Indicators of Essence'. Steps 1 through to 3 allowed both role specific and common themes to be articulated.

## 5.2 Step 1: School and Role Specific Notable points (An example)

| Step 1: Sunny Fields | Step 1: Forrester Hill | Step 1: St. Monica's |
|---|---|---|
| Role specific notable points compilations in table form | Role specific notable points compilations in table form | Role specific notable points compilations in table form |

Figure 5.3 Step 1 School and role specific notable points

Within Step 1 the interpretive procedure for each school was the same, however, Figure 5.3 shows that it is a Forrester Hill example that is drawn upon to illustrate this step. The reason for this was that it would be the New Teacher data that was most likely to reveal one particular component that was being sought from the notable points data. This component was the place that espoused values played within the texts of each school. The New Teacher at Forrester Hill had been there for the shortest period of time (approximately two months) and therefore I felt that it would be her insights that proved most valuable. The data from the other two data sites echoed the New Teacher Forrester Hill findings but the participants concerned had been in their schools for a longer period of time and thus the 'enculturation' process of which Freebody and Baker (1996) speak would have already commenced.

For the purpose of the Reduction Phase, it was the notable points that were of particular importance, as the groupings of 'mental stereo imaging' (the *Dialogic Exchange Filter*), and processes (the *Engagement & Pedagogy Filter*) taken from the Depiction Phase in Chapter 4 were firmly embedded in these. With the conscious search for 'espoused values' in action, it was the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy (SWP) subset within the *Engagement & Pedagogy* filter that was important in relation to finding evidence of whether or not the 'espoused values' of each school were a part of everyday thinking and language use and thus evidence of being everyday 'norms and assumptions' capable of being translated into practice (Schein, 1992).

In Step 1 the notable points data were collated as shown in Table 5.1 which is an example taken from the Forrester Hill New Teacher data. To help assist in the identification of references to espoused values, I have indicated the most obvious references to these in bold (including references to the Jacaranda tree which tie these together).

**Table 5.1 Notable points from New Teacher at Forrester Hill**

| Notable points from New Teacher | |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>valued staff/valuing others/adding value/contributions valued/</li><li>empowered staff/reaching potential/a feeling of 'I can! We can!'</li><li>positive school mood/hope</li><li>heralding opportunities /open opportunities /possibilities</li><li>inclusiveness not time related but willingness related</li><li>big picture systemic/big picture of student needs</li><li>celebrating professionalism</li><li>giving responsibility/showing trust</li><li>collegial sharing/give and take</li><li>team centred (**Growing together**)</li><li>meaning making through tree metaphor/'why' conversations create meaning /common understandings/ multiple places and spaces that meaning takes place (**tree metaphor**)</li><li>celebrating individuality/maintaining individuality is a strength</li><li>neutral mediation space/resolving differences</li><li>encouragement/warm encouraging space for students</li><li>safety/support/care</li><li>alternative approaches embraced</li><li>banishing preconceptions</li></ul> | <ul><li>shared values</li><li>SWP relating to authoritative pedagogies (**schoolwide pedagogy**)</li><li>language of insight/mindful of needs</li><li>clearly defined leadership expectations</li><li>language of parallel leadership/parallel leadership alive</li><li>acknowledging gifts/strengths of others</li><li>leadership responsibility embraced</li><li>student centred/not self-centred</li><li>collective commitment/all on board</li><li>high established expectations/best outcomes</li><li>stepping back to step forward</li><li>upholding dignity (**individual dignity & worth**</li><li>acceptance of starting points to understanding and growth (**tree metaphor**)</li><li>purposeful dialogue and action/Articulation of goals</li><li>ability to turn words into actions/Goals made achievable</li><li>incidental language reinforcing culture/ authentic language/natural not contrived</li><li>links to vision, values & SWP/visual connections (**vision, values & SWP**)</li><li>worried about feeling excluded but did not happen/offering inclusion/ never feel alone/ sense of belonging/cosy</li></ul> |

Legend: The wording in bold refers to specific terminology connected to school' vision, values or schoolwide pedagogical principles (SWP).

The links to espoused values were apparent but trying to separate out a list of specific references to these appeared counter-productive because Forrester Hill's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles were tightly embedded within the New Teacher's notable points (indicated in bold within Table 5.1) and it was their position within these that held meaning.

It was at this point that I took the time to return to the Main Question in order to refocus. I reflected on the value of isolating the widely embedded 'espoused values' within Forrester Hill's New Teacher's data. By trying to isolate the espoused values from the remainder of the data I was micro-managing the data in a way that did not reflect the phenomenological intent of keeping the 'whole picture' of the language construct in mind. I felt that further separation of the artefacts indicative of espoused values from their position within the notable points would result in a loss of meaning,

as well as, the repetition of words and phrases. Therefore, the intended collation of espoused values references did not occur. This in itself was a meaningful discovery. The inability to separate these artefacts and their meanings from their inherent place within the New Teacher articulations indicated that these were more than just words for her. Even though she had only been at the school for a short period of time, she had 'taken on board' understandings related to the prevailing mental models of her colleagues. It became evident that she had chosen to accept the shared espoused values that were important at Forrester Hill.

It was important to see if this was the same for all schools and so the full suite of transcripts was revisited. When searching for corroborating data within the other two schools I re-examined the notable points, multifaceted texts, and lists of process words and chose a few examples of each to indicate the embedded nature of what was found. From these examples Montage 5.1 was created. The montage combines images, quotes from participants and indicators of how these key artefacts were seen to be an integral part of each school's 'life-world' (Husserl, 1982; van Manen, 1990).

The red speech bubbles explain the filter groupings in which each example was found, thus showing that these artefacts were more than surface representations of words as references to them are found throughout all layers of data collation. They were a natural part of everyday 'language-in-use' and found within the notable points of all school transcripts (for example, students speaking of the BUDS at Sunny Fields), processes (for example, the Principal at Forrester Hill describing the building of a safe, boundaried place as being a means of 'Supporting Each Other'), and of course as artefacts themselves.

Montage 5.1 displays only a few of the many ways in which each school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles were embedded within the data. Due to their firmly established presence they are no longer examined as a separate filter sub-set which in turn saw another Indicator of Essence come into being.

**Indicator of Essence 7**: **The embedded nature of the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy is indicative of a unique cultural perspective which filters information**
The vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles display an embedded presence within the filter sub-set collations indicating holistic significance, as they filter information coming in and going out of the school.

**Montage 5.1 The entwined nature of Vision/Values & SWP in data**

"Heading in the same direction" (TL)
"If we need to – we'll try another road." (TL)
"Connecting outside own little worlds." TNT)

Notable point

"Students talk BUDS when new kids join the school & we add faces to the sunflowers".(NT)

"We are the space." (AP)

Notable point

"Systemic stuff marries beautifully with the KITES." (NT)

"From this hill we will soar" (P)

"Being KITES people" (P)

"We view things through the same lenses." (NT)

"Consistent messages." (P)

"Working in the same arena. " (P)

Sunny Fields · St. Monica's · metaphors of the **place** understanding

"The journey has been creating a connectedness" (P)
"Space that is free – like a runaway kite" (NT)

"Getting to a higher level" (P)

"It has brought us all to the same page"

**LEARNING FOREVER**
**(PODS, Flowers & Leaves)**
-   Deep Understanding
-   Quality Communication
-   Futures Focus

**GROWING TOGETHER**
**(Trunk)**
-   Relationship building
-   Values Education
-   Prior Knowledge

**SUPPORTING EACH OTHER**
**(Roots)**
-   Individuality
-   Risk Takers
-   Personal Growth

artefact

"Space to grow" (P)

"We are this tree" (T)

Growing Together - Learning Forever
**Forrester Hill State School**
**Supporting Each Other**

"Re-ignite the dialogue" (P)

"Strong relationships are our foundations" (TL)

"The tree, the vision etc they create meaning" (NT)

process

"Building a safe, boundaried place" (P)

"Finding a niche so quickly" (NT)

"We're all on the same page" (TL)

## 5.3 Step 2: Role Grouped Themes

| Step 2: Sunny Fields Role grouped themes within each school | Step 2: Forrester Hill Role grouped themes within each school | Step 2: St.Monica's Role grouped themes within each school |
|---|---|---|

Figure 5.4 Role grouped themes

As depicted in Figure 5.4, Step 2 required that from the tables of notable points collated within the Depiction Phase, the role specific points would be reduced to themes according to three role descriptions; principal, teacher leader and new teacher. Where no role equivalent existed within other schools, for example St. Monica's Assistant Principal and Forrester Hill's classroom teacher, the transcripts were not included within this comparison. Grouping all role specific perspectives together made it easier to collate themes applicable to all data sites. This ensured that there would be a methodical progression into Step 3. In addition, each summarised role sub-set acted as a convenient data source from which the *'Narratives of Significance'* were then created.

Summarised themes were created from the notable points such as those from the Forrester Hill New Teacher previously presented in 5.1. These have been repeated in Table 5.2 with the addition of theme related colour coding and words depicting the underlying theme being italicised and placed in brackets at the end of a dot point. These can then be traced through into Table 5.3.

**Table 5.2 Example of notable points with links to theme and role**

| Notable points from New Teacher | |
|---|---|
| • valued staff/ valuing others/adding value/contributions valued *(valuing self and others)* <br> • empowered staff/reaching potential/ a feeling of 'I can! We can!' *(empowerment)* <br> • positive school mood/ hope *(positivity)* <br> • heralding opportunities /open opportunities /Possibilities *(positivity)* <br> • inclusiveness not time related but willingness related *( commitment)* | • shared values *(espoused values)* <br> • SWP relating to authoritative pedagogies *(espoused values)* <br> • language of insight/mindful of future needs *(positivity)* <br> • clearly defined leadership expectations *(leadership)* <br> • the language of parallel leadership/ parallel leadership alive *(leadership)* <br> • acknowledging gifts/strengths of others *(empowerment)* <br> • leadership responsibility embraced |

| | |
|---|---|
| • big picture systemic/big picture of student needs and where to head *(the journey)* <br> • celebrating professionalism *(empowerment)* <br> • giving responsibility/showing trust *(commitment to improvement)* <br> • collegial sharing/give and take *(commitment to improvement)* <br> • team centred (Growing together) *(commitment to improvement)* <br> • meaning making through metaphor/"Why" conversations create meaning /common understandings/multiple places and spaces that meaning takes place *(the language)* <br> • celebrating individuality/ maintaining individuality is a strength *(positivity)* <br> • neutral mediation space/resolving differences *(positivity)* <br> • encouragement/warm encouraging space for students *(positivity)* <br> • safety/support/care *(positivity)* <br> • alternative approaches embraced *(commitment to improvement)* <br> • banishing preconceptions | *(leadership)* <br> • student centred/not self-centred *(valuing self and others)* <br> • collective commitment/all on board *(commitment to improvement)* <br> • high established expectations/best outcomes *(espoused values)* <br> • stepping back to step forward *(the journey)* <br> • upholding dignity (individual dignity & worth) *(espoused values)* <br> • acceptance of starting points to understanding and growth *(the journey)* <br> • purposeful dialogue and action/ articulation of goals *(the journey)* <br> • Ability to turn words into actions/ Goals made achievable  *((the journey)* <br> • incidental language reinforcing culture/authentic language/natural not contrived *(the language)* <br> • links to vision, values & SWP/visual connections *(espoused values)* <br> • worried about feeling excluded but did not happen *(positivity)* <br> • offering inclusion/never feel alone/ sense of belonging/cosy <br> *(positivity)* |

Legend: The colour coding within Table 5.2 is used to demonstrate how points from the collated tables were reduced to themes.

By following the theme related colour coding in brackets after each notable point, the New Teacher data can be matched to the Forrester Hill section within Table 5.3 which incorporates the New Teacher themes from all school contexts. (Snippets of quotes taken from the notable points are also included in italics to illustrate the combined presentation of the theme. These would later be used within the *'Narratives of Significance'* where they also appear italicised.)

**Table 5.3 New Teacher themes according to role**

| New Teacher's themes according to role | |
|---|---|
| **Sunny Fields** | • driven by *professional commitment* to student learning<br>• made *a real journey towards alignment* and *goal focussed action*<br>• community *relationships support* school practice<br>• believes *strongly in parallel leadership* and sees all staff as promoting this where possible<br>• *open and honest about their failures and their successes*<br>• created a *team that is committed* and with a strong collective sense of best *practice aligned to tried and true pedagogical principles* created in context |
| **Forrester Hill** | • a strong *empowered professional staff* built on *strong relationships*<br>• *a community that celebrates* the individual & the collective<br>• an easily perceived *culture of support* and *parallel leadership in action*<br>• *collegial partnerships* where differing opinions are valued and mediation is a rewarding process<br>• a community who are *all on board* but still willing to include others with *new opinions and ways of working*<br>• a community that connects at a fundamental level by a rich-metaphor*ical authentic language* reinforced by *professional conversations*<br>• a team of professionals who were *committed to the school improvement 'journey'*<br>• a feeling of *inclusivity, positivity and hope* where all are encouraged to succeed<br>• *strong values and high expectations* to which the community are committed |
| **St. Monica's** | • being *re-energised and re-engaged* as a professional community<br>• the *language of 'we'* as 'the visuals are reminders of ourselves'<br>• identifying that by providing students with access to the language allows them to '*share the understanding space*'<br>• the *importance of the metaphor* – the KITES creating connections and bringing others on board<br>• *individual gifts, talents and prior experiences being valued*<br>• the richness of *understanding that goes past classroom* and into the realm of adherence to principles that align practice and decision making in whatever context that it appears<br>• the strong sense of *passion and collective commitment* that embraces change in order to improve student outcomes<br>• *classroom environments themselves change in order to meet changing pedagogical needs.*<br>• the sense of *satisfaction and empowerment* when professional knowledge is *transferrable* and enriched by new experiences |

Legend: The colour coding links back to the themes colour coded in Table 5.2

This same procedure was followed to create Tables 5.4 and 5.5. As with the New Teacher data that was transferred into Table 5.3, each set of role grouped themes was summarised into Tables 5.4. and 5.5 and small quotes taken from the original data were placed in italics. These words support the emergent theme. These quotes (and others) were then carried forward into the *'Narratives of Significance'*.

It is worthwhile noting that with the use of the Forrester Hill New Teacher data in Table 5.1 which was then referred to Table 5.2 and later condensed into Table 5.3, this was the last time that single school examples were utilised to illustrate points, as I remained conscious that it was important to maintain the overall view of the phenomenon.

**Table 5.4 Principal themes according to role**

| Principal themes according to role | |
| --- | --- |
| **Sunny Fields** | <ul><li>*building capacity* in others</li><li>*establishing clear boundaries/guidelines* for action</li><li>the *strength* that is produced in a small school community when *parallel leadership* is allowed to flourish</li><li>*reflecting on past practices* in order to improve and *move forward*</li><li>*strong community relationships* strengthen commitment to goals</li><li>the *power of images* (the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy) for conveying *clear cultural messages*</li><li>being prepared to *move slowly and bring others into the picture* in a non-threatening manner</li><li>a realisation that *transparency of professional practice can prove intimidating* when new to a 'no blame' environment</li><li>*utilising strengths* to improve student outcomes(the principal also refers to own in relation to reading recover skills)</li><li>the need to *record pedagogical principles and practice* so as to ensure continuity when personnel change or are added to the mix</li></ul> |
| **Forrester Hill** | <ul><li>*provides direction* clearly linked to the school's vision and values</li><li>makes clear the connections to *systemic and school priorities*</li><li>*builds parallel leadership* and *professional capacity* in others</li><li>*facilitates* collegial *partnerships* and teacher understandings</li><li>builds team *understandings of Big Picture connections*</li><li>shows pride in the professionalism of the staff & growth in students</li><li>is *self-reflective* as to lead *I must know my own strengths and weaknesses*</li><li>*walks the journey* (being an authentic leader)</li><li>*embraces change by layering change* - teachers take one step at a time</li><li>supports staff to move to a *higher level of thinking and acting*</li><li>*simplifies the messages* and creates equal opportunities for all</li></ul> |

| St. Monica's | <ul><li>the need to *inspire and 'sell' the change process* (IDEAS)</li><li>the importance of giving the *same clear messages and expectations*</li><li>the need to deal with *systemically driven change in terms of contextually constructed meanings*</li><li>painting *big picture* understandings through mental *images related to Vision and SWP*</li><li>the challenge that listening to *student voice presents*</li><li>*questioning, questioning, questioning*</li><li>*strong collegial relationships* being the key to the *evolution of a learning community*</li><li>*professional conversations* highlighting the *strength inherent in the language we have*</li><li>the *spiritual component* of who and what the school stands for has led to a *closer relationship* with parents and parish</li></ul> |
|---|---|

**Table 5.5 Teacher Leader themes according to role**

| Teacher Leader themes according to role | |
|---|---|
| **Sunny Fields** | <ul><li>the *focussed targeted nature* of the teaching practices in use</li><li>*parallel leadership strengthens practice* and direction</li><li>placing *student need at the centre* of planning and practice</li><li>*working in learning partnerships* with the school community</li><li>the *collective approach to decision making* in the school is reinforced by *vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy*</li><li>the ability to *embrace new knowledge* (for example, Education Queensland's Literacy professional development) and put it into action</li></ul> |
| **Forrester Hill** | <ul><li>*keep* the flow of *the journey going*</li><li>*capture what was happening* as it happened</li><li>*revisit the journey* from time to time and *keep the passion alive*</li><li>*convey clear messages* to staff, parents and students</li><li>*acknowledge* and use *own talents and capacity* to lead as required</li><li>be a *conduit between teachers and principal* (mindful awareness)</li><li>promote a culture of *pedagogical reflection*</li><li>focus teacher *attention on to student need as* we strived for improvement in student outcomes</li><li>facilitate deeper understandings developed through *focussed professional conversations*</li><li>keep the *vision, values, schoolwide pedagogy* and protocols *upfront*</li><li>let go and *allow others to lead* thereby ensuring succession</li></ul> |

| St.Monica's | • shared ownership and *feeling of rightness –vision, values and SWP* |
| | • growth of *parallel leadership* |
| | • the emphasis that is given to *creating connections* and *developing depth of meaning* |
| | • the focus on metacognition, integration, and differentiation all signs of *'expert' teacher practice* |
| | • *discovering the need to change and changing to meet the need* |
| | • *empowering teachers* to be able to justify the things they do *professional confidence* has grown so that advice is given freely |
| | • *evolution of both parent and student voice* (contributions) |
| | • contextually constructed *language captures professional understandings, spiritual connections and cultural aspirations* |

The dot points within Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 were the themes that next became summarised according to the key italicised points being made within each. Table 5.6 brings these key points together to form a combined matrix of school and contextually specific key points related to theme.

Table 5.6 becomes the anchor point for the remaining reductions and groupings in order to determine 'essence'. Each key point within Table 5.6 can be directly linked to one of the three preceding tables (Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5). Role specific, theme-related key points can be seen grouped by reading down the matrix in a vertical manner. Contextually specific, theme-related key points can be viewed by reading across the matrix in a horizontal manner.

**Table 5.6 Theme reductions into key points according to role and context**

| Context | Principal | Teacher Leader | New Teacher |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sunny Fields**<br><br>**Caution** (P) – Transparency of practice can be intimidating | Building capacity/Empowering practices<br>Establishing clear guidelines<br>Strength in parallel leadership<br>Reflecting on practice builds future direction<br>Building strong relationships<br>Sending cultural messages through imagery<br>Embracing change slowly<br>Utilising staff strengths<br>Keeping records of the journey | Focussed targeted teaching to priorities<br>Parallel leadership/Strengthening practice<br>Placing students first<br>Working in learning partnerships<br>Making decisions collectively<br>Reinforcing direction with reference to vision, values & SWP<br>Embracing & acting on new knowledge | Professional commitment to student success<br>Making a journey towards alignment<br>Focussing on attaining shared goals<br>Supporting practice through partnerships<br>Promoting parallel leadership<br>Sharing successes and failures openly<br>Creating collective commitment<br>Aligning practice to schoolwide pedagogical principles |
| **Forrester Hill**<br><br>**Caution (NT)** – exclusion possible | Establishing clear direction<br>Connecting systemic and context priorities<br>Building parallel leadership<br>Building professional capacity/ Staff growth/facilitating partnerships/higher levels of thinking & acting<br>Showing pride in staff & students<br>Painting BIG Picture understandings<br>Reflecting on self and others practice<br>Embracing change through layering change<br>Walking the journey (authentic leadership)<br>Simplifying the messages | Keeping the journey going/Capturing the journey/Revisiting the journey<br>Conveying clear messages<br>Acknowledging own gifts & talents<br>Being mindful of others needs (a conduit)<br>Promoting pedagogical reflection<br>Focussing on student need/Improving outcomes<br>Facilitating deeper understandings to grow<br>Keeping vision, values & SWP upfront<br>Allowing others to lead | Empowering staff /building quality relationships<br>Celebrating success<br>Differing opinions are valued<br>Journeying together and all onboard<br>Connecting through metaphorical vision<br>Committing to school improvement<br>Promoting positivity, inclusivity and hope at every opportunity<br>Establishing strong values and high expectations |
| **St. Monica's**<br> | Selling the process<br>Giving clear consistent messages<br>Systemic priorities within context<br>BIG picture understandings via Vision & SWP<br>Listening to student voice<br>Questioning is the key to learning<br>Building strong collegial relationships<br>Facilitating professional conversations<br>Spiritual roots brings community together | Sharing ownership of vision, values and SWP<br>Growing parallel leadership capacity<br>Creating connections and deep meanings<br>Focussing on expert practice (metacognition)<br>Dealing proactively with the need for change<br>Empowering teachers to understand reasons for choices made<br>Encouraging student and parent voice<br>Capturing professional, spiritual and community understandings in language | Being re-energised and re-engaged<br>Developing 'we' - collective commitment<br>Bringing students to shared understandings Bringing others on board through rich-metaphor & quality conversations<br>Valuing individual gifts and talents<br>Authentic learning going beyond the classroom<br>Aligning practice and decision making<br>Embracing change with passion & commitment<br>Changing environments to match pedagogy<br>Empowering practices are transferrable |

Legend: Reductions of themes to key points according to role and context. The vertical axis presents the role specific key points. The horizontal axis presents the contextually specific key points:

Because Table 5.6 held the key to tracking the continuing reduction process it was revisited once the *'Narratives of Significance'* were complete, as there were many overlaps between role specific themes and school specific themes which needed to be explored in more detail. However, creating the table of key points had brought with it a sense of fragmentation. This needed to be addressed and thus the *'Narratives of Significance'* were created as a means of representing the nature of each participant's lived experience, rather than a table of isolated key points divorced from 'life-world'.

## 5.4 Step 3: Linking Themes into *'Narratives of Significance'*
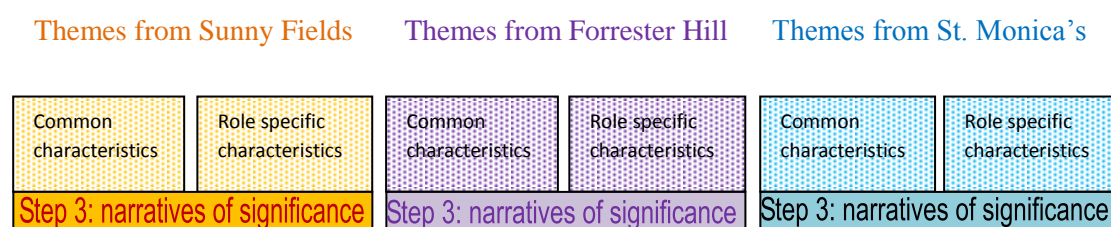


Figure 5.5 Themes of lived experience highlighted by *'Narratives of Significance'*

The data collated in Steps 1 and 2 facilitated a deeper analysis of whether there were significant differences in the language-in-use characteristics which might be dependent on a respondent's role. The groupings derived from the first two steps also provided lists of summarised themes from which underlying linking themes would appear. These groupings had brought to light the warp and weft threads of the 'language-in-use', however, their fragmented character lacked the sense of wholeness of lived experience being sought. The *'Narratives of Significance'* were written so as to weave these theme threads into tapestries of understanding (woven verbal 'Snapshots') more indicative of the 'wholeness' of van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological attitude as a writer and researcher.

Taking into consideration that many of the 'mental stereo imagings' and processes were already found within the notable points, the summaries within Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 formed the basis of the *Narratives of Significance'*. However, so much more had emerged from the transcripts and so the feelings, impressions and interpretations that had arisen throughout previous interpretations were brought together. As a whole they help to create a hermeneutic tapestry woven from a "play with language in order to allow the research process of textual reflection" to contribute to a greater

understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990, pp. 1-2). This required returning to the original transcripts at times in order to capture these lived experiences in their most descriptive and evocative manner.

The reduction of data down to the *Narratives of Significance* for each data site was conducted in the following order:

**1st** - Sunny Fields was less familiar to me than Forrester Hill and by analysing their experiences from an 'outsiders' perspective it seemed possible that linking themes might emerge less influenced by my own preconceptions.

**2nd** - Forrester Hill data were extensive covering a long time period therefore the linking themes within its data would be wide ranging and varied so it was of benefit to explore this data next, particularly in relation to the extensive chronological collations of the multifaceted texts.

**3rd** - St. Monica's experiences of the phenomenon were from a shorter time period. The fact that this school was from a different system and state had meant that all the way through this analysis their data had been used, to some extent, as a verifier of what was being discovered in the other two data sites.

To reiterate a clarifying point, sections within the *Narratives of Significance* which have been taken straight from transcripts are indicated by italicised text. The *Narratives of Significance* are presented from the perspective of each of the participants according to their role. This had been the case for some time but it was as the *Narratives of Significance* were woven together that the "gift of the meaning from the symbol" (Ricouer, 1967, p. 348) was bestowed on these narratives.

The symbols (**Þ**, **Ṉ̵**, **Ŧ, ŦŁ**) helped to formalise the roles into a symbolic nomenclature less disruptive to the flow of each narrative. Occasionally, other names are used by the symbolic speakers; such names when they appear are place marked by a single letter followed by three dots. The constructed narratives present my interpretation of the fundamental nature of each respondent's transcript interlaced with snippets of direct quotes supporting the interpretations made. At the end of each *Narrative of Significance* is a brief reflection on what unfolded in relation to the summarised themes already uncovered.

The *Narratives of Significance* are written in a mixture of present and past tense for that is how they were represented within the data sets. Data were recorded at a particular moment in time when the thoughts and feelings expressed were upper most in the participant's mind, however, many of these thoughts related to a participant's past experiences. They are therefore representative of their, then current, lived experiences and memories of lived experiences. Occasionally, a narrative incorporates a larger direct quote which is indented from the main text and which has been taken directly from the respondent's original transcript. These are used to illustrate the passion and nature of the voice being heard.

## 5.5 The *'Narratives of Significance'* at Sunny Fields

Due to the small numbers of students and therefore staff at Sunny Fields it had always been difficult to separate one voice from another within their data. The strong collaborative nature of this community meant that experiences spoken of by one staff member were echoed by others. Therefore, in each section I have attempted to focus only on what seemed to be insights that belonged primarily to that respondent alone.

### 5.5.1 The language-in-use by the Principal at Sunny Fields

When talking about the past the Principal (**Þ**) who is a teaching principal refers only to the relationship between the school parent community and the staff at the school which she describes in terms of a battle. **Þ** speaks of an *us and them scenario* and that the parents were *always fighting* against what the staff wanted to do within the school. The parents on the Parent and Citizens (P&C) committee were particularly vocal and difficult to connect with when she was appointed as Principal in 2005. This caused *many a sleepless night* for **Þ** after a P&C meeting. She felt lost as to how to *make the connections needed to ensure that relationships could improve*. At one point she says "*they just crucified me*" (and both teaching colleagues agreed with this disturbing analogy).

With the advent of IDEAS, *the collaborative nature of the process saw a complete reversal in the relationships* within the community. Within the bridge building time,

between the culture of antagonism and the one of harmony that is now present, there was a transitional period of the community *slowly coming together.* Þ speaks of *growing pains but it was no longer us and them.* As parents became more involved in the running of the school it even became necessary to establish *certain parameters –* to avert parents from participating in absolutely everything. Þ now sees *100% support from the parent body, as parents are now sure that the needs of their children in their context are the priority.*

When describing the present, Þ talks about *goals* and *looking forward* and how important it is to give *consistent messages* when building trust and cohesiveness. She believes that the goals and consistent messages are both tied to *the school's visions, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles.* The vision of "Growing beautiful futures in the valley of opportunities" is fundamental to the nature of the school community and Þ revels in the way that *parents really connect with our vision. It is the BUDS values of Be honest and responsible; Use respect; Do your best; and Show care, understanding and fairness* that lie at the heart of *student understanding and commitment to their school and their peers.* When speaking of how the three teachers and aides now align their teaching practice it is to the SMARTS pedagogy that she refers. *Our SMARTS came out of our conviction that our students needed multiple intelligence, hands-on learning in our classrooms.*

She is intent on *meshing together* the outside imperatives and the internal needs to create *Big Picture understandings. Teamwork* is valued within the teaching team, as well as for students, and she acknowledges that she could not manage without the support of the *parallel leadership team* (which is basically all the school staff). She speaks of needing to *go away and reflect* and that it is important to introduce initiatives that *flow out of what was there* already. There is pride in the ability of the staff to action pedagogical improvement *centred on students* and a feeling of vitality and energy with references such as *being generated*, *bouncing ideas, growing* and *fired up the imagination.* She talks of the need to *bring others into the small little circle* and therefore the need to *capture the Sunny Fields story.* The language-in-use is focussed on a pedagogy of *active learning* which is well matched to *the hands-on practical nature of farm kids* and Þ seeks to *embrace that.* As a teacher she speaks of how of the strategies used within classrooms fall *under the umbrella of creativity,*

that the *big winner for students was the use of technology* when learning, and how inventing, building, acting and physically *active learning were conscious strategies* put into place as the result of listening to student voice.

Þ believes that, within such a small school, time is of the essence, so the *pedagogy had to be transparent, aligned and effective*. When there were only two teachers at the school they were *living the pedagogy – breathing it – but there had been no time to write it down*. When N̵Ŧ returned to the school it became necessary to *articulate and document the schoolwide pedagogy* so as *to bring her into the loop*. Þ and ŦŁ realised that *the close knit nature of (their) teaching partnership could shut others out*. In order to be inclusive it was important that they *bring in other's ideas and pedagogical practices*. As a result of the *literacy professional development* undertaken *there were new understandings* too, and this meant further *changes in practice* resulted. This required a re-think of the schoolwide pedagogy – with saying that Þ states that they also had to make sure that *past quality practices were not lost*. She speaks of how *challenges can be faced when relationships are strong*. Through continual interaction and reflection she and her staff were able to regularly reflect on data and *make changes where needed so that no student falls too far behind*. Þ *reflected on her own strengths as a past reading recovery teacher* she consciously places herself within rotational reading groups so as to best utilise this strength. A metastrategic viewpoint enabled her to *clearly identify the strengths* of ŦŁ and N̵Ŧ and allow them to lead in their areas of strength.

Pedagogical considerations guide decisions related to budgeting. Aide support is targeted at student need. *Seamless transition* between early, middle and upper year levels has been led by *student need for security* and managed through *aligned pedagogical practices*. This alignment is reflected in the unique language-in-use within the school. *People like the feel of the school – in part it is the language that creates this feel…the language they hear is a point of reference for what they hear elsewhere, even though it may not be a conscious act*. Þ also mentions the time she spent on updating the *school website to reflect the school's vision, values and pedagogical beliefs* and sees the website as important for *connecting families to who we are as a school community*.

Þ reflects upon having to *learn to read the messages from others* and how she relishes the opportunity that leadership gives her to *develop the skills of others.* Her tone of voice lights up as she celebrates *the joy of watching students and staff grow* and how being able to stand back and let others lead required *strength and trust.* She also speaks candidly of *the difficulties faced* when ṈŦ first rejoined the team. It had been necessary to *tread slowly* as *bringing the new person on board required conscious effort and focussed conversations.* Not knowing what a *'no blame' environment* was all about *was threatening to* ṈŦ who interpreted complete openness and transparency as lack of trust in her professionalism. However, by *emphasising the vision and centring on student need* understanding was reached, as is evidenced by ṈŦ's professional growth.

Þ speaks of allowing others *independence* [in] *initiating* [and] *embracing new ideas.* And how she is intent on *extending leadership, offering opportunities, letting leadership emerge, allowing others to grow* by *acknowledging their talents and expertise, being flexible and giving them voice.* In many different ways she speaks of needing to be *creative in her thinking* as she looks to *move the school forward.* In relating to what she needs 'to do' and 'to be' as team leader she sees these needs as related to *risk taking, stepping back, sustaining focus, offering opportunities* and *being prepared for change.*

She sees the capability of achieving these goals as being facilitated by the *deep conversations* that now occur and by *having the language* of the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy in place as it has *provided meanings that are shared.* She sees her staff as always *adapting things to meet the Sunny Fields context.* She speaks of having to make sure that *our story is captured* in various forms of media so it is not lost, *as the website story* has been a powerful way of *conveying the school's message* to the wider community.

> *Who we are now has been gradually emerging – it takes time! Reflection is daily practice now. We are always thinking ahead: questioning; re-confirming; fine-tuning; realising; redesigning; reflecting; linking back; reminding; comparing; confirming; and, working to improve what we do as a*

*team. We are constantly fitting practice around priorities, hearing student*
*voice and pushing each other forward in a drive for expert teaching practice.*
(Principal)

**A brief reflection**

The Sunny Fields Principal's key points taken from the matrix table (Table 5.6) are unmistakably evident:

- Building capacity/empowering practices
- Establishing clear guidelines
- Developing parallel leadership
- Reflecting on practice builds future direction
- Building strong relationships
- Sending cultural messages through imagery
- Embracing change slowly
- Utilising staff strengths
- Keeping records of the journey

The cautionary note about how the transparency of practice that occurs in a 'no blame' environment was one that she had clearly grappled with while the newest member (the returning member) of her staff had struggled to find her feet within this new culture of openness and sharing that had been developed. What was most prominent in this narrative was the sense of community that had been established and the manner by which school goals and community goals were now one and the same. This was a huge journey forward for the school as a whole. The other point possibly not brought out within the summarised themes list was the extent to which both systemic need and student need were interwoven throughout the metastrategic thinking processes that the Principal shared with her entire parallel leadership team.

## 5.5.2 The language-in-use by the Teacher Leader at Sunny Fields

The Teacher Leader (ŦŁ) is both a teacher and the wife of a local farmer. ŦŁ intimately knows the difficulties faced in a small farming community and over the years has shared deep contextual understandings with Þ who does not live locally.

ŦŁ and Þ are personally and professionally very close and throughout the period of time when the numbers of students dropped at Sunny Fields, it was the closeness of their teaching partnership that cemented their pedagogical understandings of the principles of practice that have now been captured, so as to be shared with others. ŦŁ speaks little of the past except to agree with Þ. However, there are clear implications in her use of words such as *travelled*, *progressed*, *focussed on what we want now* and *try another road* that indicate that she sees the school as having *a new sense of direction* linked to *the journey* taken through IDEAS. She sees *the Vision, the values and the schoolwide pedagogical principles* as *the framework* within the school *that everything else hangs on*. The types of conversations that now occur between teachers and assistants are *along the same lines* and keep everyone *fully in the loop*. ŦŁ identified that when ṆŦ came back to the school she suffered culture shock as *the ways of working were so different.*

Her world is directly tied to her students and her language is *centred on student learning* and *empowering students to fulfil their potential.* She speaks of finding *glimmers of positivity* for a troubled child and how establishing a school *environment* where students *do not feel threatened* encourages the building of *positive feelings in students towards learning*. She paints a picture of *professional focus* by the teaching team as their *common understandings* lead them to know exactly what they want and that they will not accept second best. This is vividly expressed as *being on the warpath, looking for things* in the books at a book fair that would reinforce their new understandings of *expert teaching practice.*

When exploring the teaching practices that are now shared within the school ŦŁ speaks of *assessing the prior knowledge* of students so that *teaching was not built on assumptions.* She refers continually to the *quality teaching practices* now in place: fine-tuning practice; a collective approach to celebrating learning, focussing on possibilities; individualising practice to meet the needs of each child; practising caring and aware pedagogy; *being discriminating*; and, building on success. Her language-in-use is one of *high expectations*, and how they never seem to get where they want to be as there is always *a new teaching challenge.* Challenge is viewed with *confidence* and *authoritative understandings back their actions* centred on improvement.

Staff work together to create a clear pathway for students across the school and students are comfortable with which ever teacher or aide is with them at the time. ŦŁ also explicitly states that by *bringing concepts to life* with hands on *active learning* connects students to the learning process as *that is the kind of kids we teach*.

> *A couple of months ago I was having trouble with something in the classroom that needed fixing and thinking out loud I said "Gee I wish I had a pair of pliers" Sam jumped up and said "Hang on Miss! I have a pair in my bag." Sure enough he went out grabbed a pair of pliers and then fixed it for me. Farm kids – they really know what to do. You can really understand why more than anything else at school they lo-o-v-e technology – building things with their hands, designing, inventing – it's just second nature.*

ŦŁ has strong understandings about the role *parallel leadership* plays within the school and totally supports its continued development. *It's no longer us and them - it's a partnership with parents*; *enabling, engaging and empowering part-timers*; *a preparedness ...to share the load*, and *building capacity in teacher aides*. She talks of how one of the parents who *lives in town* brings forward her ideas as to how to *promote the school in town so our numbers don't drop again*. She also praises the commitment and ability of the teacher aide leader *who can run this place if she has to and in fact she has already done so when Þ was away and I was sick.*

 ŦŁ refers to *active processes* such as building, creating, involving, performing, progressing, developing, focussing, supporting, and succeeding. She also refers to *culture reinforcing* processes such as building positive attitudes, trusting, working together, remaining positive, not placing blame, and being willing to take risks. As a co-facilitator of the IDEAS process she speaks of *alignment, considering externals*, and the importance of a team that is *heading in the same direction*. There is a sense that metastrategic thinking has become an embedded way of thinking for her, as well as for the principal.

**A brief reflection**

The Teacher Leader narrative has embedded within it her summarised themes (taken from Table 5.6):

- Targeting teaching priorities

- Strengthening practice

- Parallel leadership

- Placing students first

- Working in learning partnerships

- Making decisions collectively

- Reinforcing direction through vision, values and SWP

- Embracing & acting on new knowledge

Linked to this lived experience narrative is a sense of professional empowerment and satisfaction with the quality of the professional engagement and capabilities of the school staff. Her delight in the hands-on learning style or "active learning" shows her attuned thinking in relation to student need. (This is clearly reflected within the school's pedagogical framework.) She displays real pride in how far they have come as a staff and as a community.

## 5.5.3 The language-in-use by the New Teacher at Sunny Fields

N̦Ț had been present at the school at the very beginning of the school engaging in the IDEAS process, however, she had left the school when student numbers had dropped and did not return until approximately 18 months later. She talked of how, when she returned, the school had completely changed and that she felt as if it was a different place than the one she had been in before. In her personal life she was *feeling directionless* and the feeling of being in a school with *a lot more direction* where her colleagues were *focussed on student need* and *talked teaching and learning all the time,* gave her direction as well. She identified that there was a need to *teach students in ways that connect students* to events *outside their own little worlds*. She talks of the *consistent messages* being given within the school and to parents and how there had been *a massive turn around in the attitudes of parents* and the support that they gave in comparison to when she had last been at the school. She also speaks of *responding to the needs of students* and how the teaching team *views issues through the same lens filtering information through the school vision*. She speaks candidly of the difficulties that she first faced on her return to the school as she struggled to *get my head around new ideas* and having to *put in more time*

improving her practice, but now she feels comfortable and supported and they were *all heading in the same direction*.

N̲Ŧ appeared to echo many of the points made by Þ and ŦŁ. The majority of points generated by N̲Ŧ herself relate to the changes in practice that she saw on her return to Sunny Fields. She speaks of *conversations that spin back to what does this or that mean for our children* and what it means in relation to best practice. She explains how everything is viewed through *a common lens* and that *everything relates back to our vision, values and pedagogy*. She explains that now the school has *real direction* and close relationships have developed between teachers and families with *parents understanding our goals and hav[ing] come on board*. She relishes the *clarity and sense of focus that comes with aligned pedagogy that brings renewed energy and positivity*. She also talks of *raised expectations being challenging* and that with the *new sense of professionalism all they ever do is talk teaching and learning – sometimes they have to be reminded to have fun*. She makes the observation that *comparing practice improves practice* and constant reflection, evaluation and reflection again moves their practice forward. She also celebrated the progress made by students and how this is highlighted when a comparison is made when new students join the school.

As the teacher who had been at the school for the shortest period of time and had returned to the school after a long period of absence, N̲Ŧ's main references are to processes connected to student learning and finding her place in the 'new' Sunny Fields. She talks of *changing physical spaces to encourage student understanding*, the importance of *embedding early skills* in students, the *having to think about the 'why'* of her practice, and the need to be *looking for and talking about the positives*. With relation to her teaching colleagues she speaks of how they *were coming from a different place now* and that the *focus of action* within the school was *collective, goal oriented, student centred* and concerned with the *aligning of practice* across the three classrooms.

N̲Ŧ's perspective is particularly insightful as it is built on comparisons from the past to the present. Many of her views are valuable reflections on the culture of the school as it was then and is now. Her insights present a picture of a staff that is very much a

parallel leadership team in Crowther et al.' s (2009) sense with a combination of teacher leadership and metastratgeic principal leadership being articulated.

**A brief reflection**

On returning to the school after some time the New Teacher expressed her real amazement at the pedagogical distance travelled within a relatively short time (as shown in her summary taken from Table 5.6).

- Committing to student success
- Making a journey towards alignment
- Focussing on attaining shared goals
- Supporting practice through partnerships
- Promoting parallel leadership
- Sharing successes and failures openly
- Creating collective commitment
- Aligning practice to SWP

She confirms how much community and school relationships have changed. She also explains how the open and transparent nature of the shared pedagogy in action was intimidating to her at first. However, she too now displays a confidence and commitment that has re-energised her and given her direction in a time of personal feelings of being directionless. Her insight into the need to change her classroom setup to match her new pedagogical understandings that are built from listening to student voice and working collaboratively is worthwhile noting.

## 5.5.4 The common language-in-use by all respondents from Sunny Fields

It is understandable that in a close knit rural community, such as the one in which Sunny Fields State School is situated, relationships between school personnel and parents should play a prominent role in the efficacy of school initiatives towards attaining school goals. The explorations of the transcripts from the teaching staff illustrate this fact. The transformation in community school relationships over the four years since the school committed to the IDEAS process was unmistakeable and all three teachers commented on this major change. Parallel leadership and shared

whole schoolwide pedagogical practices were strongly apparent. Combining the sections in bold within each reflection saw three additional key points emerge:

- school and community goals are one as they are linked to vision; blending metastrategic and practical context understandings
- active learning as pedagogy; listen to student voice
- a sense of energy and commitment and strong community relationships

(These additional key points would later be combined with those within Table 5.6)

## 5. 6 The *'Narratives of Significance'* at Forrester Hill

At Forrester Hill the contextually specific language-in-use was so familiar to me that it was difficult to maintain consciousness of its many attributes and their meanings. It is the perspective given by the New Teacher at the school that particularly highlighted some of what otherwise might have been taken for granted. With saying this, however, each participant had rich insights to share as to the attributes of the school's current culture and ways of working.

### 5.6.1 The language-in-use by the Principal at Forrester Hill

When talking about the past, the metaphors used by the Principal (Þ) related to when she *first arrived* at the school as its Acting-Principal in 2006. In relation to the IDEAS process itself she had arrived just after the school had completed its schoolwide pedagogical (SWP) statements and after a period of leadership uncertainty and negativity. A strong parallel leadership team was in place within the school but the 'no blame' culture was under threat without the metastrategic leadership that had once been in place. Consequently, as the person 'at the top' she could see that the staff were feeling *lost at sea.* It was as if the staff had *set out on a journey* but *the lead navigator had fallen overboard and they had lost direction*. As a principal who had worked with the IDEAS process in her previous school she was able to *pilot the ship* and after a short period of transition it set sail in deep waters and was well on its way again.

The Þ talks of this *transitional period* (the period before she was officially appointed Principal) as if a flame, once strong, had died to a flicker. By *reigniting the dialogue* she picturesquely captures the sense of excitement that having *a clear sense of direction* brings. She is clearly a metastrategic leader who speaks of *supporting staff to grow* throughout this period. Þ speaks very little of the past, no doubt because she had not been involved in the school's IDEAS journey from its beginning and also because it did not take long for the school to again head in the right direction. However, when it came to the present she was far more eloquent.

Þ paints a vibrant picture of the school as it functions *now* using word imagery such as *seeking deeper understandings*, *made the connections*, *allowing them (teachers) not to be overloaded*, *embracing what needs to be done*, *work their way through*, *embracing opportunities*, *creating a level playing field* and *working as a team*. She strives to *allow their craft to flourish* in order to *enrich[ing] children's lives*. The metaphors that are most specifically the Principal's and hers alone, are related to *simplifying the messages and actions* to be taken and *developing a parallel leadership* team that gives the *school strength and life*.

When exploring the themes emergent from the notable points from Forrester Hill's transcripts there were many that were shared by all respondents but the points raised by Þ alone added another dimension to the language and provided insights into the internal language she employed to develop her own understandings and sense of direction – this was her 'space' within where understanding took place. She spoke of *celebrating and valuing each individual* thereby *empowering others* to grow. She talked of the need to *understand herself as a person and as a leader.* By being strong in her self-knowledge she could then *support others to grow.* As a leader she saw that she must *individualise her support* and *acknowledge and build on the strengths of others.* She saw the role of *making connections* and painting Big Picture understandings as being essential to gaining *collective commitment to the need for change.* Þ talked about the need to *exemplify and espouse the school's values and beliefs* (walking the talk). By *fostering collegial relationships* teacher practice is strengthened. By *fostering community relationships* through *creative ways* the school as a whole is strengthened. Þ gave the school musical as an example of how quality relationships promote growth:

> *...the musical. That was so much a whole community opportunity to pull together. That was our vision and pedagogy in action – the learning opportunities, the support, the growth. The many things that have come from that musical are amazing and the talents within the school that were allowed to come forward and be nurtured, the teacher aides, the prep aides, C..... (the music teacher) and the parents supporting their kids and sewing and all that. It created opportunities for some of our most troubled kids to really grow – it nurtured them – made them more responsible.*

Þ speaks emphatically about the need to *make change manageable* and how by *prioritising and layering change* staff could tackle change according to their own competency level, matched to student need and supported by the leadership team. She demonstrated *pride in staff willing to go the extra mile* as their *increased professionalism* pushed them to *reach their potential* and *improve the learning opportunities* for students. *Fostering responsibility and ownership for actions* was expected of both staff and students and demonstrated by the leadership team as a whole. She is proud of her staff and their ability to continually learn and get their heads around new ideas.

> *The staff are very receptive to change here. When you allow them the time and space to have the conversations where you debate change you know that the staff will embrace what needs to happen...many conversations within the school reflect a deep understanding, they've got the ability to work their way through things and always then decide to do the best that they can – and they are always looking at ways of making their teaching stronger.*

Primarily Þ thinks of herself as *the architect* working alongside her building team. Her mental links to the metaphor of building can be clearly seen as *building capacity in others* she sees as her most important role: the capacity to *improve their teaching practice;* the capacity to work together in *collegial partnerships;* and the *capacity to lead* within a team of parallel leaders. She sees the building of *strong relationships* within the whole school community as *the foundation upon* which school *improvement is built* and talks with excitement about one of the many community partnerships which are in place:

*Our woodworkers, when they come, they, without me having to tell them, they know, they live our values, they relate to our values, they want to bring opportunities to the school and they plan months in advance. They don't even ask much anymore – they are just part of the team and they plan for next year and suggest purchases that will benefit the work they do with kids and they have just taken over this option as theirs.*

Þ pro-actively strives to maintain *a learning culture* of *'no blame'* which is *capable of being sustained* over the long term. She continually strives to *make connections* for her staff and *build team understanding* of *the reasons why* all the while linking them to the school's beliefs and values.

**A brief reflection**

This narrative is one of a strong metastrategic leader who displays strength of character and action. As is shown in this summary taken from Table 5.6, hers is a dynamic language grown out of the solid ground of quality relationships that now exists between students, teachers, parents and the community.

- Establishing clear direction
- Connecting systemic and context priorities/ Painting BIG Picture understandings
- Building parallel leadership
- Building professional capacity/ Staff growth/facilitating partnerships /higher levels of thinking and acting
- Showing pride in staff and students
- Reflecting on self and others' practice


- Embracing change through layering change
- Walking the journey (authentic leadership)
- Simplifying the messages

Forrester Hill's IDEAS journey is very much her journey as well. Þ has taken the heart of what had been developed and then built the capacity within her staff to allow the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy to flourish. She delights in the strength

within the school due to the networks of relationships that have been created. Her metastrategic messages are reminiscent of how Crowther et al. (2002) see teacher leadership, in combination with metastrategic leadership, contributing to successful capacity-building, as proposed in *Developing Teacher Leaders*, the dynamics of which were explored in Figure 5.6.

## 5.6.2 The language-in-use by the Teacher Leader at Forrester Hill

The ŦŁ language being described is my language, as I am just as much a participant in the current research endeavour, as I am a researcher. I took on the role of one of the key IDEAS facilitators one year after the revitalisation process had commenced. What triggered my willingness to be involved in such a fundamental way was the difference that could be clearly seen, felt, and heard within the school, after just one year of being involved in the process. For me, the image of the past was one of a school bogged down in negativity with *no clear sense of direction*, where internal power groups ruled and teachers retreated to *a world of blame* on a regular basis. It had become so much easier to blame the students, the parents, the system, and society for the fact that no matter how hard teachers worked student results were not improving and student behaviour was deteriorating. Teachers felt they were truly lost and the *add-ons and overload [were] sapping energy* and commitment.

The commencement of the process saw the beginning of *a real turn around*. It *was a powerful catalyst.* With this turn around came a *change in the way people thought and talked* within the school. We were creating a clearer *internal language system* that helped us to communicate externally in ways that had not been available to us previously. Through exploring our personal pedagogies and individual personalities we were brought together in collegial rather than just congenial ways. Myers Briggs (1962) typology understandings helped us to not only deal with *personalities on the far end of the spectrum* but also to understand 'in-the-grip' behaviours of ourselves and each other. We could therefore help and support rather than criticise. The establishment of a 'no blame' environment meant that staff were able to *share their insecurities and their strengths.*

As I reflected on the present and looked back at the past it became very clear how far we had come as a school community *"Growing Together, Learning Forever and Supporting Each Other" through good times and bad – our vision had real meaning for us*. Even though we did become a little lost on our journey when the past Principal left, when **Þ** arrived it was as if we had detoured into a short dead end street where it was *simple enough to do a U-turn* in and be back on track in no time at all. This *was not the lost that we had felt before* the IDEAS journey had commenced. That lost had ended up in rough country and fractured staff relationships.

I feel the present is a very different place. There is now *a clear sense of real direction* and *paying lip service* to strategies for improvement is a thing of the past. Our joint understandings of our Values Seeds – respect, responsibility; dignity and worth; cooperation; confidence; participation, and honesty – as well as, our PODS behaviour expectations of *Practising safety, Overall respect; Demonstrating learning and Showing responsibility – have particular meaning for our students*. The links through to the Jacaranda tree metaphor are strong and just seem to *sit inside our heads as we work, talk and plan together.* Our schoolwide pedagogy of *Growing Together, Learning Forever and Supporting each other reinforces the tree metaphor,* as *we grow together (the trunk), through building strong relationships; we learn forever by learning and displaying future oriented skills and achievements (the leaves, flowers and PODs); and support each other by supporting and being supported by our community as a whole (the roots).*

*Deep conversations* over a number of years had *clarified exactly what our students needed* and how we were going to get there. The sense of *collective commitment was infectious* and our school management team, consisting primarily of teachers, was steadily growing with nearly half the staff involved in regular strategic planning meetings led by teacher leaders. IDEAS *celebrates the work of teachers and schools* and through deep conversations and *focussed action* staff have often continually found themselves *one step ahead of the agenda.*

As **ŦŁ,** I had felt the need to be continually *mindful and attentive* to what was happening and what needed to happen. I was particularly concerned with *capturing the unique qualities* of what had been developed through hard work along our

IDEAS journey. *Capturing the essence of the vision metaphor* in multifaceted texts across the school *provided constant reminders* of what we believed in and therefore *where we were going*. Knowing that my own time at the school would be coming to an end, Þ and I knew it was important to *put a strong induction program in place* before I left, as bringing others to an understanding of our journey had been one of my leadership roles. I knew I had to *step back and let others take the lead.*

Over the years as a means of *reinforcing and revisiting the protocols* within IDEAS we would rotate display items from the past, as well as *produce new* images and documentation of current brainstorming sessions and future agreed directions. I became *a conduit* for understanding between the staff and the administration team when things got rough before the present Principal joined the team. This higher level of involvement in the *strategic running* of the school continued as Þ embraced my leadership capability and supported me to grow. In turn I *led colleagues to a deeper understanding* of administration issues and considerations.

As I reflected on my responses to the questions I realised that my whole focus back then had been on processes and action. My role had been to *create and lead* opportunities for *staff reflection. Critical thinking* was essential as problems faced were *analysed and 'creative solutions reached'.* At the time before the original Principal had left, it had been up to the two key facilitators (of which I was one) to take the responsibility for keeping the process moving and for doing some of the metastrategic thinking that was needed at the time. This had *challenged and inspired* us in ways that were irreversible. The *change in mindset* and *increasing capacity to lead* saw my fellow facilitator embrace the role of Assistant Principal in another school. On the other hand I remained and commenced study centred on further *developing* my own *understandings of pedagogy* and *quality teacher practice.*

Þ encouraged me to expand my skills and allowed me time to work with the Education Department's IDEAS Project Officer working in schools across Queensland.  I also *utilised 'my gifts'* as an artist and musician to *strengthen the vision metaphor* within the school. *Symbolisations* of our vision, our schoolwide pedagogical practices, our values and our expected behaviours (PODS) slowly evolved from staff, student and parent conversations. As a community we *reflected*

*on our practices* and how these could be improved and invariably these reflections were documented and displayed so that even those who were not present on occasion could remain within the knowledge loop.

**A brief reflection**

It was interesting to look back at my own answers to the interview questions and identify that the themes captured in Table 5.6 had been accurate.

- Keeping the  journey going/Capturing the journey/Revisiting the journey
- Conveying clear messages
- Acknowledging own gifts and talents
- Being mindful of others' needs (a conduit)
- Promoting pedagogical reflection
- Focussing on student need/Improving  outcomes
- Facilitating deeper understandings/professional conversations
- Keeping vision, values and SWP upfront

However, there was one powerful message that needed to be highlighted and that had not been captured to date. That was the strong sense of satisfaction and empowerment that we received as a staff when we found that we were continually one step ahead of the agenda. This awareness reinforced the strength of the process itself and our growth as a professional learning community. The other strong messages within this narrative related to the importance of authoritative understandings in improving practice and the need to carry out induction in order to bring newcomers into the picture.

## 5.6.3 The language-in-use by the Teacher at Forrester Hill

The Teacher **(Ŧ)** links the past to images of a school *not really getting anywhere.* The school was quite young when the inaugural principal had retired. A replacement principal was not appointed for 2 years and in that time a succession of Acting-Principals had *paraded through the school*. Teachers *did their own thing* and *did not talk at a deep level.* Ŧ talks about *staying in her hole* and that *it was enough just to survive one day a time*. When the substantive principal was finally appointed there were many factions within the staff, students were disillusioned with the school and

behaviour issues were escalating. Even with the appointed principal's guidance *we didn't seem to know how to get somewhere.* The process itself gave staff a focus and a *vehicle for changing things around.* Ŧ speaks about the big learning curve that was taken as teachers were forced 'out of their comfort zone'. The dreaming phase saw the *igniting of passions* and the *building (of) collaborative understandings.*

When speaking of the present, Ŧ's language-in-use is rich with 'mental stereo imaging' related to *being part of a team* of teacher professionals *centred on (student) learning.* She speaks of *creating opportunities* for parents and students and how *being a team player* means that it is not always win-win but *how we can work together.* The sense of being *actively involved* as part of *a learning community* who are *all on the same page* is empowering and a far cry from her images of the past. There is a real sense of amusement and respect for the principal and her passions, as she speaks of staff going with the flow when Þ *has a bee in her bonnet.* The *respect and pride* that Þ showed in her staff is obviously reciprocated.

Ŧ speaks of learning to *step back and have a look* and even *going back before moving forward* so *we are not reinventing the wheel every time. Reflection has become a strong* part of her *practice* and she sees this as a *team action.* Her focus of inquiry is centred on *targeting (student) needs* and she believes that *we can cater for individual children here.* What is truly fundamental to Ŧ's messages and the meaning that she has created is the connection that she feels to *the school's vision and the complex weaving of action with imagery related to the tree* and what that means for the school as a whole. She states *we are this tree* and *we are a community.*

As Ŧ describes her lived experience of teaching at Forrester Hill over the years, she explores many of the characteristics of her present teaching practice which are strongly linked to the practices of others. There is a *depth to the dialogue* between teachers creating *shared understandings of quality pedagogical practices: consistency of planning; individualising attention; clear guidelines; explicit teaching; targeted teaching;* and, *learning partnerships.* She speaks of the leadership team giving *the same message to everyone* and how *threads are tied together, roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated,* as are *the priorities which are agreed upon* and clearly *based on student need. Creativity* in relation to forms of expression, *innovative pedagogical practices,* ways of *connecting students to learning,* creating

*authentic real life learning and assessment* experiences and *creating space where sharing and reflection can occur* are echoed throughout Ŧ's transcript. The tree metaphor and the vision which she emphasised so emphatically are related *to nurturing student potential,* the creation of *solid foundations* through the Vision Program and the *establishment of strong, quality relationships.* Ᵽ's open door policy she sees as part of a culture that fosters *'no blame', trust,* shared responsibility, *shared leadership* and *responsiveness to concerns.*

There is a clear sense that the Forrester Hill teaching team is just that – a team. She celebrates the movement forward that has happened over the years and yet also acknowledges *the distance that is still to be travelled. Change and challenge* are accepted as inevitable. *Changing staff, changing clientele, high expectations* and *exploring student data* means that *practice and planning is reviewed and improved* in order to meet identified need. Ŧ talks *passionately and compassionately* of the students, their families and the provision of *more than just an academic education.* There is also a focus within Ŧ's reflections on *hearing and accepting other points of view, valuing each member of the school community as an individual* and *challenging both staff and students* to *reach their full potential* and how *confronting difficulties with positivity* supports and nurtures success. She too senses that we are *always working just ahead of where EQ* [Education Queensland] *wants us to be.*

It proved difficult to capture everything that Ŧ spoke about so passionately. So I returned to the list of processes derived within Chapter 4 (see the example from Appendix E). Ŧ's dialogue relates to *commitment, reflection, authenticating practice* and *connecting teachers and students* through *meaningful processes and substantive conversations* built around answering *carefully targeted questions.* The processes of which she speaks are action oriented and relate most specifically to *teachers reviewing their own practices* and taking on the *challenge of changing pedagogy* in order to *meet student needs* as evidenced by the following: *differentiating, clarifying, deciding, detailing, doing, embedding, improving, including, updating, using, moving forward and planning.* There are also many references to the *values oriented approach to teaching* which is evident in Ŧ's perception of what teaching at Forrester

Hill is all about. She refers to processes such as *nurturing, celebrating, accepting, becoming, engaging, giving, individualising, involving, establishing 'no blame', realising potential, respecting, self-actualisation, valuing and welcoming.*

**A brief reflection**

Although there is not a summary of themes for the teacher at Forrester Hill (as I did not have data for equivalent roles within other schools) her insights reinforce others' perspectives. She also talks of being ahead of the agenda and that the school had moved so far from its original beginnings to become the professional learning community that it is now. Her focus is on classroom practice and how to make the connections for students. Her world is focussed on providing the best outcomes for her students. Ŧ's passion and commitment are unmistakeable.

## 5.6.4 The language-in-use by the New Teacher at Forrester Hill

The New Teacher's (ŅŦ) perspectives on the culture and ways of working at Forester Hill provided unique insights into how an outsider first viewed and then embraced the language and practices within her new school. She uses images *such as I thought it would be hard to break into but it wasn't* and how she thought that she would be *struggling with finding a niche*. ŅŦ came from a small country school where she was an integral part of the school and the community. She feared that she would lose her identity in a large school situation.

The intensity of her surprise and delight at how different the reality was to her expectations provided a feeling of affirmation for the parallel leadership team at Forrester Hill. ŅŦ explains how she *found a niche so quickly*. She says there was *a place for me* and that she did *not get lost in the new space* instead ŅŦ says *I found my own place* and *she didn't have to sacrifice who I am*. She talks of how *teachers feel so empowered* and that *feeds down to the students.* However, she also intuitively perceived that *if you sit outside (the learning community) you really are alone.* She sees that there is a small group of individuals who may sit on the outside *the circle of influence* through their own choice and *we need to be conscious of that.*

Apart from her insights of quickly becoming part of the learning community she highlights a number of key understandings that reflect how the language-in-use was

perceived by new eyes. She talks of their being *a sense of direction* and that staff know *where the school is going*. She likens it to a train journey with a clear destination (school improvement) in mind and sees that the majority of staff are *very much on that train* and *we are going there together*. After only eight weeks of being part of this school community the symbolisation of *the school's vision, values and pedagogical principles are woven* throughout her dialogue. She clearly links what the school is today with the *vision stuff, PODS expectations and the BUDS strategies* and describes how *the tree – the visual – sits in my head* and that *the tree, the vision etcetera – they create meaning.*

ŊŦ's ultimate sense of belonging is linked emotionally and cognitively to the *warm space, the encouraging space* that she sees around her and her *real feeling of I can.* This is essential to ŊŦ's feeling of belonging as she is a strong 'doer' who wants to be part of the action. Her initiation into Forrester Hill was not without stressful moments, however, she says the *language…is very positive full of possibilities* and speaks of how *differing opinions are valued.*. Where differences exist teachers are asked to *step back from here* to *mesh our ideas* and *to bridge the gap* by looking at the *common goals, the vision and the pedagogy* that are so fundamental to the school and lie at the heart of decision making processes.

ŊŦ's insights are interesting in relation to the visual metaphors that are so obvious within the school. When it was explained to her that there were songs that also reinforce the vision and values she immediately offered to introduce them back into the fabric of school life. She sees these as *valuable reinforcements* and referred to how the Year 6 Drama group had sung their own values song as part of a drama presentation on the PODS celebration parade and how much the students in the audience had enjoyed the singing and had very quickly picked up the chorus and joined in.

Another of the powerful messages that ŊŦ conveys is the influence of the pedagogical principles on the language used when teachers are planning together. She referred *to how professional conversations linked the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy to student needs* and the actions that therefore should be taken next. She sees the dialogue within the school as being *purposeful* and that even *the incidental language used within the school reinforces its culture*. She speaks of how

staff search for answers to the *'why' questions that create meaning*. ṆŦ clearly articulates the *connection* between multiliteracies pedagogy (one of the two main *authoritative pedagogies* upon which the schoolwide pedagogy was based) and the activities that lie at the heart of the Literacy Block rotations. Her frequent use of words such as *safety, support, care, valuing contributions, opening opportunities, creating possibilities, offering inclusion, establishing high expectations* and *acceptance of starting points to understanding and growth* reinforce elements of the SWP framework. She also insightfully noted that in relation to the staff who she perceived as being on the 'outside' of the learning circle (she identified three) that *inclusiveness* was not time related *but willingness related*. She also noted the evidence of *parallel leadership alive* in every meeting held within the school and that *expectations* from the leadership team were *clearly defined*.

ṆŦ's speaks in awe of how students are encouraged to lead and give voice to their opinions and says she was *blown away* when hearing the Year 6's lead the Anzac parade and how school planning and direction is influenced by the Year 7 student leadership team. Processes of mediation feature strongly in her narrative as she had joined a newly formed Early Years team consisting of teachers with views at the *far end of the spectrum*. Her references to processes such as *not blaming*, *understanding, supporting, mediating, responding and resolving* indicate how conflict resolution unfolds at Forrester Hill. Following on from the earlier insights into ṆŦ's lived experience of being a new teacher she also uses process words such as *accepting, encouraging, empowering, celebrating* and *valuing* to paint the picture of a culture based on trust and strong relationships.

**A brief reflection**

The New Teacher's insights were powerful ones as they confirmed the opinions of others, as well as revealed insights into some of the underlying assumptions that had become taken for granted within the school, as summarised within Table 5.6.

- Empowering staff/building quality relationships

- Celebrating success

- Parallel leadership in action

- Differing opinions are valued

- Journeying together and all onboard

- Connecting through metaphorical vision

- Reinforcing through professional conversations

- Committing to school improvement

- Promoting positivity, inclusivity and hope

- Establishing strong values and high expectations

In particular her insights highlighted the role that students play in relation to leadership and decision making. The need to 'listen to student voice' is so engrained that it was these 'new eyes' that saw the importance of this clearly. Insights into how staff, together with the parallel leadership team, answers the 'why questions' so that direction is clear and unequivocal are also enlightening. She builds further understandings around the concept of 'being on the outside' and said as far as she could see it was 'their choice' and that she had never felt excluded as she chose to be committed to the ways of working within her new school.

## 5.6.5 The common language-in-use by all respondents from Forrester Hill

For these participants, the language within the interview transcripts from Forrester Hill is one of shared mental models (both individual and collective) illustrated by 'mental stereo imaging', notable points and processes that refer not only to unique perspectives but also to dynamic common themes. Additional key points to the ones captured within Table 5.6 relate to:

- Strength through relationships and community (**Þ**);

- Pedagogy based on shared authoritative understandings;

- Being one step ahead of systemic agendas; the importance of induction (**ŦŁ**);

- The  tree making the connections for students; connecting learning to the outside world, passion and commitment (**Ŧ**);

- Listening to student voice; answering the why questions; shared understandings; teachers have the choice to be committed or not (N̩Ŧ)

# 5.7 The *'Narratives of Significance'* for St. Monica's

This school's identity is closely linked to their vision and the image of the kite (representative of their schoolwide pedagogy) as well as their spiritual heritage and beliefs. Both float in and out of the *'Narratives of Significance'* as if they were indeed being led by the breeze, with the tail of the kite being the journey itself which has hoisted it aloft. As in the Forrester Hill group of narratives, the additional staff member's insights (this time it is the Assistant-Principal's) are included within the narratives to add further insight into the lived experiences of the St. Monica's staff.

## 5.7.1 The language-in-use by the Principal at St. Monica's

A very strong metastrategic leadership language thread is woven throughout the Principal's transcript. Þ speaks of *skilling others*, and *building the capacity* of her staff to think in a *metacognitive fashion*, leading staff to connect the pieces together within big picture understandings and guiding them to *view changes in the light of present actions and capabilities.* As a leader the Þ has been very conscious of *starting with little steps* and by not moving *too quickly through the process and engagement, authentic ownership and commitment has evolved as our way of working included everyone. Relationships between staff at the commencement of the process were of a friendly and cooperative nature. There were complex relationships between some parents, the school and the parish* which at times were difficult to negotiate but were certainly not considered a problem. However, the concept of *relationships changed significantly* as the IDEAS journey unfolded. Þ speaks of staff/student relationships now being built on *engagement and differentiation* and how this required *a different type of organisation* on the part of teachers. This link between conscious organisation and relationship building is directly related to the

*reflective nature of current teacher practice* with collective *transparent decision making* tied to what is *best for the students,* and therefore questions reflect this central concern.

The underlying unifying factor of the Catholic faith is evident and **Þ** sees that the Catholic concept of *common good… resonates well with IDEAS and how we work now. Not that we didn't before – but there was still a bit of I want, whereas now it is we need.* There is a distinctly *metacognitive pedagogy* in place which can be clearly seen reflected in the Schoolwide Pedagogy. **Þ** identifies one of the key aspects of the language-in-use as being *the questions that are now asked* which are embedded in every conversation in meetings and classrooms. These questions are not primarily questions related to who does what and when. These questions are the sort that *solicit cognitive and pedagogical responses* rather than organisational. She stated that organisational responses were still needed but the *responsibility* for the mechanics of an action is now shared rather than left to the official administration team and *teachers initiate actions* and *follow them through.*

Metacognition has been *opened up to parent understandings so that they can feel a part of it all and support the concept at home* reinforcing the metamorphosis from relationships into partnerships. *There is a change in the quality of the conversations – an openness that creates understanding.* This openness has *de-mystified processes* and decision making for parents and teachers because we can all *connect the dots together* and *create a picture of the reasons why.*

In the **Þ**'s view the changes have been significant and *changes in one area flow into change in another.* There are many references within the Principal's transcript that relate to the significance of the current language-in-use within St. Monica's. Students are using the language and **Þ** speaks of overhearing one Yr 6 student talking to another saying *"you have to have this knowledge because without the knowledge you can't have success".* She goes on to say that there is a *common understanding of terminology (which) is necessary to move a team forward as a team,* and, *we talk of vision and SWP as living.* Speaking with a tone of wonder and delight, she shares

how powerful the vision is for students and that a parent had shared with her the manner in which her son took his KITES understandings to an interview at his future school.

When speaking of the school's vision Þ gets excited and explains that the evolution of the *Vision seemed serendipitous* and *destined to be* with visual representations being viewed as *reminders of ourselves. The parting words of the last Mercy sister* to be Principal at St. Monica's had been "from this hill we have a clear vision for the future" and so the vision *"From this hill we will soar"* came into being. The key symbols of a kite, the hill, and the child are seen as representative of *who we are* and *our KITES pedagogy keep us all heading in the same direction. The KITES are our framework of pedagogical principles related to Knowledge (knowing how to soar takes great understanding); Innovation (you don't know where the breeze will take you); Taking risks (by facing the wind we can soar to great heights); Empowerment (soaring can be easier when you take control of the strings); and Success (soar your kite to the highest height).*

The significance of *the IDEAS journey* is particularly strong with the word journey appearing at regular intervals throughout the Principal's dialogue. There is a strong celebratory component to the language-in-use and celebrations are seen as *sending the right messages*. St. Monica's language is one of possibilities and joy and Þ states that *celebration is so important…that feeling of excitement and getting together.*

When Þ speaks of the past it is mainly in reference to staff relationships being congenial but that teachers expected the Principal to lead. Þ had been the lead facilitator of the IDEAS process in her previous role of Assistant Principal. She talks of selling the idea and the need to develop the leadership skills of others and how there had to be a gradual *letting go* to *encourage others to lead*.

Speaking of the present evokes a passionate reaction by the Principal who delights in the way staff demonstrate a *new professionalism* as they *get to a higher level of understanding*. She speaks of how *creating ownership* of the process meant *everybody putting their hand up* to be included in the school management team. She explained how the parallel leadership team was *not the driving force anymore* and the way parents and the parish show their full support. Þ talks of the *evolution of a*

*learning culture* where teachers *look at their roles in a different way*. Teachers became *partners in the learning process* and *mentor each other* as the need arises. The vision*, values and SWP umbrella everything* within the school and are strongly linked to *spiritual as well as educational understandings and commitment.*

The are many indicators of the metastrategic role that the Principal played as she speaks of very deliberate actions such as : *targeting key parents; building big picture notions; investing time; pursuing aspirations;* and *putting systemic initiatives into existing boxes.* She talks of the *challenges that needed to be overcome* and how *student and parent voice* and involvement have been profoundly rewarding. Parallel leadership is acknowledged as being central to the movement forward and that staff have developed the ability to keep reflecting on their practice and *going back in order to move forward.* The development of metacognitive understandings is indicative of the *knowledge growth* within the school at both a staff and student level and there are indications that the parent community have also started this metacognitive journey.

**A brief reflection**

The Principal at St. Monica's played an integral role in facilitation of the process itself. Many of her themes relate to the passion she has for the journey they have been on together as a school community. These themes have been captured in Table 5.6 as the following:

- Inspire and sell the process
- Giving clear consistent messages
- Systemic priorities within context
- BIG picture understandings via Vision and SWP
- Listening to student voice
- Questioning is the key to learning
- Building strong collegial relationships is the basis for creating a learning community
- Facilitating professional conversations
- Strength in the language itself
- Spiritual roots brings community together

Þ's narrative brings to light the strength of the parent involvement in the school and how faith underpins how the community thinks and works together. However, even with such a prior connection, the relationships have changed dramatically allowing parallel leadership to flourish. She has also emphasised the role that metacognition plays in authenticating pedagogy and practice, as the focus on thinking about thinking meets the needs of all learners and learning styles. Students take their understandings of the KITES pedagogy and metacognition beyond the school grounds.

## 5.7.2 The language-in-use by the Assistant Principal at St. Monica's

The Assistant Principal (AÞ) had joined the school one year after it had commenced its IDEAS journey. She does not refer to the past in any significant way but her insights into the transitional period provide a sense of a dynamic force being in action when she joined the school team. In many ways this force had *a power of its own*. She speaks of *putting things on the back burner* in order to *capture the moment*. In relation to the evolution of the vision and Schoolwide Pedagogy she talks of them as *being meant to be* and *the kites have taken us in that direction.* When speaking of the present her mental images are primarily related to the *collective commitment and team work* that is now part of the fabric of school life. She talks *about rich conversations* and how *we are the space where understanding takes place.*

AÞ talks of the importance of the journey and how the understandings that emerged *umbrella everything*. She believes that teachers *see themselves as learners* – as does the leadership team. The focus on *rich learning tasks* is allowing for *differentiating learning* to occur and *builds individual strengths*. She sees the common language they have developed together as *guiding practice – all on the same page now*. With the strength of what had been created becoming clear it has become important to consider *induction* for new staff, families and even the supply teachers. AÞ also celebrates the fact that, as external systemic directions become clear, teachers are already *set up for these changes* to take place and in fact are often *one step ahead.*

The processes that feature prominently in the **ĄP̧**'s dialogue relate to *conversing, communicating, prioritising, aligning, connecting, negotiating, reinforcing and the making of connections.* Hers also is the language of metastrategic leadership and has a particular focus on valuing: valuing the *input of others*; valuing *sharing*; valuing *movement forward;* and, valuing the *clear sense of direction* that the IDEAS process has provided.

**A brief reflection**

The Assistant Principal role is a one off one in relation to correlations between data sets. None-the-less her insights have provided a focus on how staff are empowered by being one step ahead of where the system is wanting them to be. She also emphasised how it was necessary to go slowly and not overload staff and therefore, as a leader, prioritising was necessary. She also echoes the Principal's view that the vision and schoolwide pedagogy wording was "just meant to be" and that new people to the school relate to the visual metaphors that abound.

## 5.7.3 The language-in-use by the Teacher Leader at St. Monica's

The past is barely featured in the teacher leader dialogue. When speaking of the transition period the Teacher Leader (**ŦŁ**) talks of how the process evolved and how teamwork has become prominent. The metaphors that really mean something to the **ŦŁ** are those related to the vision and schoolwide pedagogical framework. She uses the 'mental stereo imaging' of *reaching high expectations* and *celebrating learning by soaring kites to the highest heights* and *challenge* as represented by *the hill to climb* as major vision symbol components. The **ŦŁ** also sees the language within the school as being *the language to go forward.* She is clear about the fact that there is still a long way to go and *that there are still gaps* but also celebrates how much has been achieved to date. She sees *positive relationships* as being *the foundations on which learning is built* and that the *development of collective commitment* has seen others taking on leadership roles within the learning community and that it is *not the IDEAS team driving the changes* in practice.

The **ŦŁ** speaks of how initially there had been no shared language, even about values, and there were *fundamental inconsistencies.* Taking the time to make

meanings explicit created shared understandings which teachers reflect on and then journal. She explains that teachers have a *real sense of ownership* and that others, including aides, students and parents are *empowered to contribute*. The parents, in particular, identify *to the spiritual links* that are strongly present in the visuals and language of the SWP.

The teacher leader expresses immense pride in the uniqueness of the vision and how the creation of the KITES pedagogy seemed serendipitous. The articulation of the metaphor was a powerful connector for parents, students and teachers, connecting people to each other, connecting teachers and students to learning and connecting authoritative understandings to contextual understandings in *teachers' mental space* (cognitive mental models). *Recording the special times as visual memories connects the past to the present.* Vision and SWP images play an important role in *connecting hearts and minds to the language of St. Monica's* and the *shared language is at the heart of shared understandings.* It gives teachers the vehicle to connect with other teachers *no matter where we are or what year level we teach.* This language is seen as capable of opening the mind's eye to new views.

As a facilitator of the process itself the ŦŁ uses *the language of leadership and the language of classroom teaching.* She speaks of *encouraging, articulating, connecting, developing depth, meta-thinking* and *establishing foundations*. While at the same time she expounds on the *need* for *differentiating learning, having high expectations, gaining knowledge, synthesising information, meeting student needs,* and *leading learning.* There are also references to transformational processes: showing *pride; opening minds; feeling of rightness; innovating; empowering;* and, *being freed to grow.*

**A brief reflection**

The teacher leader has become a strong metacognitive thinker. Her language is one of making connections and empowering staff through deep conversations connecting practice to vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy. Her summarised themes taken from Table 5.6 highlight this clearly.

- Sharing ownership of vision, values and SWP
- Growing parallel leadership capacity

- Creating connections and deep meanings/sharing understandings of best practice
- Focussing on expert practice (metacognition)
- Dealing proactively with the need for change
- Empowering teachers with professional confidence
- Encouraging student and parent voice
- Capturing professional, spiritual and community understandings in language

Her insights are one of heartfelt connectedness: connectedness as a community; connected by past through present and future; through the words of the vision, shared faith and future aspirations; and connecting learning to the outside world. By reflecting on teacher mental maps ŦŁ articulates the shift in thinking that has occurred within this learning community and how the community as a whole is now on board.

## 5.7.4 The language-in-use by the New Teacher at St. Monica's

The New Teacher (ŅŦ) to the school talks only of her past – not the school's – and the fact that coming to St. Monica's *re-energised her teaching practice* and *re-engaged her enthusiasm.* She gives vivid descriptions of how she *connected* to the essence of her new school through *the strength of the vision and Schoolwide Pedagogical Framework.* She sees everyone as *being on board* and sees strength in the fact that her *previous knowledge* could be utilised and she had a *part to play.* She also emphasises how important the visuals were to her as a new member of the school community and that the *visuals are a reminder of ourselves* (highlighting how quickly she saw herself as a part of the community). She also saw how the leadership team was intent on *sitting back and taking the time* to reflect and how this *reflection space* provided *space that is free.*

As someone new to the school she describes how she *felt valued and enriched* as a professional. The *excitement and passion* of the leadership team and the staff for the vision and SWP was impossible to ignore and after *teaching for thirty years ...it was really refreshing.* Her words *taking my knowledge and adding value in new contexts* paints a vivid picture of new levels of professional engagement. As she speaks her language invokes images of strong teacher professionalism as she aims to empower

students by encouraging *students to vocalise learning needs* and what works well for them *giving students the language to share their understandings*. This has *lessened student* sense of *frustration* because they can now *articulate problems* they are experiencing. She talks of how staff *brainstorm new approaches* and how to *capture student interest* and that *professional conversations are engaging* and promote *collective commitment* and how staff work with teaching partners to *address pedagogical concerns.*

The importance of the vision and SWP for this new teacher is unmistakeable: *the language of metacognition* is present in teacher and student engagement; *referring to the visuals keeps us focussed and aligned*; the *metaphor links the meanings;* and *self learning comes from linking – it is the chain in my head.* ṆŦ also explains how classroom layouts are changing *evolving out of changing practice.* She gives examples of this such as: *establishing student learning teams; differing work station arrangements; changing learning teams;* and, students working with others in *mixed ability groupings* to *promote responsibility for own and others learning.*

ṆŦ talks of processes that are indicative of the professionalism evident within the school with words such as; *adding value, addressing concerns, going beyond* what was necessary, *innovating, prioritising, questioning, reflecting, scope and sequencing, sharing, showing respect,* and *up-skilling.* There is a *richness of understanding* that goes beyond just classroom concerns as she talks of *aligning practice* across the school and that *vocalising the vision* and schoolwide pedagogy made it possible to *create the connections* and focus on *bringing others on board* by engaging them via the rich-metaphor and its *inspirational meaning.*

**A brief reflection**

The New Teacher at St. Monica's speaks with passion and commitment to the values, vision and schoolwide pedagogy of her new school which she sees as re-energising her as a teacher. Her summarised themes taken from Table 5.6 are strong ones.

- Being re-energised and re-engaged
- Developing 'we' – collective commitment
- Bringing students and staff to shared understandings
- Bringing others on board through rich-metaphor and quality conversations

- Valuing individual gifts and talents

- Authentic learning going beyond the classroom

- Aligning practice and decision making

- Embracing change with passion and commitment

- Changing environments to match pedagogy

- Empowering practices are transferrable

Her positive reflections on being able to add value and her satisfaction with the fact that her knowledge could be moved around so easily to fit within her new context, echoes the thinking of the New Teacher Forrester Hill. Her analogy of a "chain in her head" is indicative of the cognitive links she had made between practice and the rich-metaphor of the vision and SWP at the school.

## 5.7.5 The common language-in-use by all respondents from St. Monica's

Of the three schools examined St. Monica's has been on the IDEAS journey for the shortest period of time, having commenced the process in 2007. In this relatively short period of time both professional and community interactions have altered significantly.

From these narratives additional key points were added to St. Monica's summary:
- authentic teaching and learning through a common focus on metacognition; taking understandings into outside world (Þ);

- empowerment through underpinning faith; community working together; and, relationships have strengthened (ĄÞ);

- connectedness; a shift in thinking; everyone is on board (ŦŁ);

- simplicity through rich-metaphors; the strength of the visuals to reinforce who we are; the power of critical mass (ŅŦ)

## 5.6.8 'Indicators of Essence' from all 'Narratives of Significance'

From this rebuilding of the 'wholeness of experience' two further 'Indicators of Essence' emerged from the key points found within the additional themes within the narratives. Each additional theme has been brought forward and then colour coded.

The purple references relate to a community commitment theme, and the red ones to a theme related to alignment. These themes are in addition to those tabled in Table 5.6:

- Additional key points from Sunny Fields: *school and community goals are one as they are linked to vision*; *blending metastrategic and practical context understandings* (Þ); active learning as pedagogy; listen to student voice (ŦŁ); a sense of *energy and commitment* (ŅŦ)

- Additional key points from Forrester Hill: *Strength through relationships and community* (Þ); *pedagogy based on shared authoritative understandings*; being one step ahead of systemic agendas; the importance of induction (ŦŁ); *the tree making the connections for students*; passion and *commitment* (Ŧ) listening to student voice; answering the why questions; *shared understandings*; teachers have the choice to be *committed* or not (ŅŦ)

- Additional key points from St. Monica's: authentic teaching and learning through a *common focus on metacognition*; taking understandings into outside world (Þ); empowerment through underpinning faith; *community working together*; and, *relationships have strengthened* (ĄÞ); connectedness; a shift in thinking; everyone is on board (ŦŁ); simplicity through rich-metaphors*; the strength of the visuals to reinforce who we are*; the power of critical mass (ŅŦ)

Firstly, from every context the message came through that school improvement is built upon strong relationships, commitment, and partnerships (the purple italics). The next was the way in which the alignment of understandings and practice to a shared school vision and goals indicated strong cognitive mapping taking place schoolwide (indicated by red italics). Thus **'Indicators of Essence' 8 and 9** emerged.

> **Indicator of Essence 8: School improvement is built on a foundation of strong relationships and commitment to community**
>
> Relationships are the key to whether positive change occurs, or not. It comes back to the protocols of 'no blame' and 'success breeds success'. It is quality relationships which form the basis of collective commitment and empowerment capable of driving any agenda forward.

## 5.8 Step 4: Reflecting with the Plane of Multifaceted Texts



Figure 5.6 Phase 2 Step 5 Linking to the multifaceted texts

As indicated by Figure 5.6, the next step in the process of reduction was to view the multifaceted texts to determine which of the themes within these text types were reinforcing those taken from the notable points. It was also important to discover if by any chance there were suggestions of themes that had yet to be uncovered. Because although much had been revealed, the visual data, records and field notes had still not been explored to ascertain the themes within them that may, or may not, add additional knowledge to the existing themes from Table 5.6, or the few additional ones brought to life by the *'Narratives of Significance'*. Therefore the multifaceted texts were examined for themes which were then compared to those already determined.
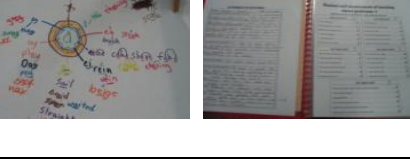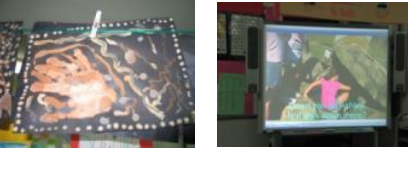
### 5.8.1 Reflecting on themes using the multifaceted texts at Sunny Fields

There were few visual records of a chronological nature from Sunny Fields. This is largely due to the nature of the 'lived experience' undertaken by the staff which meant that everything had been undertaken together when there were only two

teaching staff involved for the majority of the time. Notes from meetings and explorations of pedagogical understandings and the like were not seen as necessary at the time because the two teachers had well developed understandings of the direction that they were heading. (This changed with the arrival of the New Teacher.) None-the-less, there exist many representations of the important artefacts of the present school culture from which possible themes were derived and captured within the right-hand column of Table 5.7. These themes were derived from the indicators in the left-hand column which were taken from field note observations and reinforced by selected visual depictions relevant to the theme (depicted in the central column).

**Table 5.7 Linking themes from Sunny Fields**

| Indicators | Visual representations | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| • Vision and values linked to farm community base<br>• Website, signs, pamphlets<br>• Strong student collective identity & focus on teamwork - camps and sporting events |  | **Contextually specific identity** |
| • Vision – Growing Beautiful Futures in the Valley of Opportunities<br>• Values - BUDS<br>• Schoolwide pedagogy – SMART<br>• Multilayered meanings |  | **Rich-metaphors** |
| • Active learning pedagogy – hands on technology/drama/visual arts/IT<br>• Multiple intelligences explicit part of SWP<br>• Multiple avenues of assessment and feedback |  | **Pedagogy matched to student learning style** |
| • Student learning journal<br>• Teachers questioning their practice and interrogating student data<br>• Making the links |  | **Reflective practice** |
| • Photographs, video, digital whiteboard, arts, drama & website<br>• Records that share meaning ─ creating the story of learning<br>• Capturing Sunny Field's story |  | **Multimodal texts to convey messages** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Multiple opportunities in multiple ways for students to share learning with others – peers & parents for example, drama, technology, poetry, displays & art<br><br>*(for example, research earthquakes then act out sensations and effects)* |  | **Synthesising understandings creating new knowledge** |
| • Quality behaviour celebrated on parades, on charts in classrooms, via newsletters<br>• Reminders of IDEAS journey & recent DI comparison results – major improvement on display |  | **Celebrating success** |
| • Change in culture reflected in change of parent/teacher relationships<br>• Strong parent presence at school celebration evenings<br>• Parents explore student learning with students |  | **Community partnerships** |

**The strongest themes within the multifaceted texts at Sunny Fields**

There proved to be little within the multifaceted texts that did not relate in some way to the themes already explored. However, they reinforced a number of the themes between the two data sets. The common images that translated clearly from verbal into visual were largely connected to the SMARTS Schoolwide Pedagogy and the BUDS values framework:

- the supportive strong relationships that now exist between community and school – relationships built on providing what is best for the students (the S of the SWP)

- the conscious use of teaching strategies aimed at catering for the 'multi-age multiple intelligences' within the classroom (the M of the SWP)

- artistic expression is clearly used as a means of synthesising student understandings (the A of the SWP)

- many of the visual displays within the classrooms are there specifically to support the attainment of high expectations within student work – word

banks, field knowledge banks, Functional Grammar reminders (Halliday, 1973, 1975) and inspirational quotes (the A of the SWP)
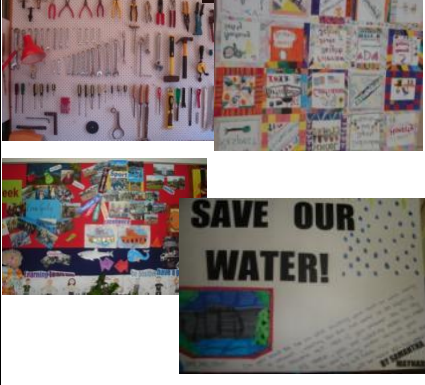
- images related to taking risks as actors, team players, and on the Emu Gully camp reinforce the building of resilience in students as do the visuals and the emphasis on celebration of learning and behaviours (the R of the SWP)

- there is a strong emphasis on 'active learning', art, drama, team building, sports, innovation and practical hands-on learning within the Technology KLA (the T of the SWP)

- there is also a strong emphasis on reflection as evidenced by the student learning journals which in turn emphasise the value placed by teachers on the power of reflection

- the importance that the BUDS values play in the lives of the students

## 5.8.2 Reflecting on themes using the multifaceted texts at Forrester Hill

The summaries of yearly data gleaned from the multifaceted texts at Forrester Hill (Appendix K and L) were collated and used as a reference to ascertain which images were being clearly reflected in public texts within the school. These texts were not representative of any one view but instead depict collective representations of artefacts that had evolved out of a school improvement journey that, up until 2010, had covered a period of close to eight years with no apparent end in sight. Table 5.8 is a collation of the main points within the multifaceted texts with identified themes indicated within the right-hand column of the table.

**Table 5.8 Linking themes from Forrester Hill**

| Indicators | Visual representations | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| • strong relationships are the foundations for learning<br>• the school community – the Forrester Hill Family<br>• strengthens the professional learning community |  | **Building on strong relationships** |
| • rich-metaphors linked to past<br>• Jacaranda Tree metaphor (Vision, & SWP) umbrellas understandings<br>• multifaceted texts & micro-metaphors (the sub-sets of related meaning – e.g., PODS, BUDS, Values seeds)<br>• all levels and abilities relate to the imagery above |  | **Rich-metaphors** |
| • the words Vision, values and pedagogy are often used interchangeably<br>• the Schoolwide Pedagogy is strengthened by authoritative understandings linking the bits |  | **Inseparable Vision, values and SWP** |
| • the importance of asking the right questions<br>• authenticity of learning experiences both teachers and students engage with |  | **Quality learning** |
| • valuing of strengths and what each individual contributes to the whole<br>• positivity and celebration "success breeds success" PODS celebration days |  | **Celebrating the individual** |
| • Big Picture understandings created for staff, parents and students<br>• All on the same page – (a common meaning system has been formed) |  | **Alignment** |
| • commitment to common goals<br>• ownership of the change<br>• teachers meet after school in school management team meetings run by and for teachers – led by teacher leader not principal |  | **Commitment to improvement** |
| • proactive involvement by both teachers and students prepared to take learning risks<br>• to tackle challenge and embrace change initiatives<br>• widening circle of learning experiences supported by community (e.g.,wood working groups, Grannies reading corner etc)<br>• new understandings of ways of working address student need<br>• cont. partnership with university |  | **Building networks expands a communities capacity to act** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • contextually specific learning journey related to student need<br>• the IDEAS process itself<br>• different voices and people had come "on board" | School Improvement Roadmap  | **A never ending journey** |
| • teacher leadership dependent on strong metastrategic principal<br>• strong metastrategic principal leadership is dependent on teacher leadership support |  | **Parallel leadership** |

**The strongest themes within the multifaceted texts at Forrester Hill**

The breadth of these visual records, captured over a long period of time, showed that some themes captured earlier were particularly strong – stronger perhaps than at first realised within the analysis of the transcripts alone. This is not surprising, as the transcripts represented only a one and a half hour reflective moment in time with participants, whereas the visual records were extracted from nearly eight years of accumulated data combined with field notes and personal reflections unrelated to the question guidelines that were answered within the interview situations.

The themes that were strongest within the multifaceted texts were related to:

• the extent to which the tree metaphor proved to be a rich-metaphor capable of being expanded, explored and transformed, acting as a facilitator for discussions and in-depth exploration of pedagogy

• ownership of collective understandings from the past reflected in the texts of the school – newcomers may have no notion of what they mean but accept them as part of the way things are done in the school (for example, the language of Glasser [1998] used within the Forrester Hill context and its behaviour management policy)



• the reflection of student understandings of school expectations and self-knowledge are clearly depicted in student drawings related to the Vision Program.

- the creative use of timetabling to allow space/place for collegial sharing and the creation of new understandings in regards to quality pedagogical practices

- the hands-on celebration activities that are undertaken regularly connect students to their peers and foster relationships across the school

- how staff see there being cognitive connectivity between students and the vision and values

- the impact that a culturally rich school website has by conveying cultural messages to the wider community



- that the language and representations of understandings are continually in a state of flux – the vision image and the SWP have changed over time (dynamic – not static) (Appendix L)

- induction for new families and new staff members plays an important role in bringing others into the Forrester Hill 'family'
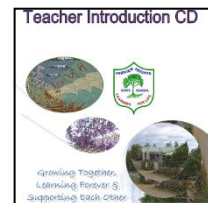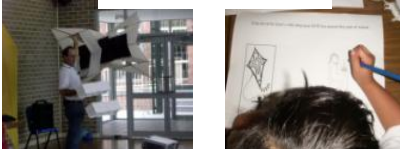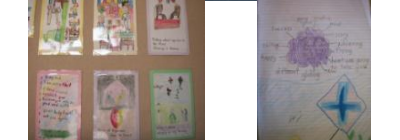


### 5.8.3 Reflecting on themes using the multifaceted texts at St. Monica's

The unique character of the St. Monica's school community was not only reflected in their vision and schoolwide pedagogical statements but in the clear links made to the importance of their Catholic faith. At the time I collected St. Monica's data the schoolwide pedagogical (SWP) statements were a comparatively recent addition to the school's 'language-in-use' and yet the reflecting, thinking and actioning occurring within the school community strongly reflected their SWP. The multifaceted texts reinforced the community's commitment to their faith more accurately and passionately than what could have been understood solely by interpreting the discussions that had revolved around the guiding questions asked.

When chronologically viewing St. Monica's multifaceted texts, it was found that 2007 was a year of introduction to the process with pictorial records being primarily related to workshop activities. However, by 2008 the extensive records demonstrated the themes within the right-hand column of Table 5.9 coming through:

**Table 5.9 Linking themes from St. Monica's**

| Indicators | Visual representations | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| • Quality relationships are the foundations for learning<br>• Commitment to Catholic concept of 'common good'<br>• Involving parents in school life changed relationships |  | **Strong relationships are the foundations** |
| • Rich-metaphors and micro-metaphors are powerful conduits to understanding<br>• The power of imagery and to echo values and beliefs<br>• Imagery is child friendly, creative & accessible to all |  | **Connecting via metaphor** |
| • The vision alive in the hearts & minds of community<br>• Multilayered meanings of the SWP and Vision |  | **Closely linked vision and SWP** |
| • Exploring meaning in a hands-on participative manner connects students and reinforces meanings |  | **Hands on learning** |
| • Collegial learning moves pedagogical understandings forward<br>• Professional conversations in changing classroom practice |  | **Professional conversations** |
| • The strength of metacognition and co-operative learning<br>• Reflection is an essential part of current practice and learning scaffolding |  | **Metacognition** |
| • The importance of parallel leadership in changing attitudes<br>• Metastrategic leadership consciously builds the capacity of others |  | **Parallel leadership** |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Past within the present & future<br>• Sharing the learning language with students and parents<br>• Conscious commitment<br>• Choice allows connectivity and facilitates commitment |  | **Creating the connections** |
| • Clear conceptualisation of the sense of journey with the understanding of there being a long way to go<br>• Celebrating whenever possible the movement forward |  | **Process seen as celebration and journey** |

**The strongest themes within the multifaceted texts at St. Monica's**

The previously compiled key themes were unquestionably reflected in the multifaceted texts:

- The strong connection between spirituality and the Schoolwide Pedagogical Principles

- Community agreement on what is considered important at St. Monica's: knowledge as building blocks; passionately engaging triggers creativity; new learnings arise from all experiences; striving and reaching potential; ownership of learning and decision making

- Language in an active learning community evolves over time

- Key pedagogical understandings (metacognition) are reflected in multifaceted texts

- Meaning filled language becomes manifested as powerful visuals and artefacts that connect outsiders to the school's essential values and beliefs

- Students identify on a personal level with the vision and wording of the SWP

- A student centred approach to understanding complex concepts means that learning is negotiated and the voices of learners valued

- Celebration of learning and collective connection strengthens sense of community

- Students' related their learning to the world beyond school – the establishment of authentic understanding that was clearly observed in

classroom activities (observations only conducted in Prep and Yr 5 due to time constraints)

- Empowering sense of students and teacher being one in their understanding

- Empathy, gentleness and well established routines when dealing with children create harmony and social connectedness (emotional intelligence)

### 5.8.4 Summary of the impact of the multifaceted text themes

Reflecting onto the plane of multifaceted texts visually captured school images and words taken from within each school context demonstrated how these text types supported themes already uncovered. In so doing they also highlighted their contribution to the transmission of cultural messages across a school community. The emphasis within Sunny Fields on their "active learning" pedagogical principles sprang to life, as did the power of the rich-metaphorical imagery at Forrester Hill, and the sense of faith and collective commitment at St. Monica's. Although uncovered previously, the place that each of these had within the 'life-worlds' of these participants grew in significance due to examination of the multifaceted texts of Data Set 2.

## 5.9 Step 5: Shared Themes from the Schools

Step 5 saw the conclusion of the Reduction Phase Part A. Four additional 'Indicators of Essence' had emerged. The first of these was that of layered understandings, the second was the need to build future direction by revisiting the past, the third was the way in which visuals reinforced shared understandings and facilitated sustainability of shared understandings to occur, and the fourth was related to the importance of parallel leadership. Each of these will be looked at in some detail.

The themes gained from the notable points and then reinforced by the multifaceted texts highlighted a particularly strong thread of underlying complexity. The concept of layering understandings to address the needs of differing individuals within a learning community saw Indicator of Essence 10 emerge. The layered understandings at Sunny Fields related to introducing the wider community, and then the New Teacher, step by step into new ways of thinking and working at the school.

At Forrester Hill, there were layered understandings in regard to systemic and contextually specific need, the encouraging of parallel leadership a step at a time and the Principal's "changing slowly" concept. At St. Monica's layered understandings related to the changing hierarchical views of leadership and sharing pedagogical understandings with parents and students at their own level.

> **Indicator of Essence 10 - Layered understandings create strength within a language-in-use**
>
> Layered understandings create strength and are reinforced by unique metaphorically reinforced images and terminologies with many characteristics being relevant to role rather than context, and with many process terms being common in the language-in-use across all contexts.

Along with this concept of layered understandings existed the realisation that, within each school, the connections created were based on treasuring the past while looking towards the future and thus Indicator of Essence 11 came into being.

> **Indicator of Essence 11 – Authentic future direction built on respected shared past**
>
> Authentication of future direction is found in treasured aspects of a school combined with its community's past.

The presence of this Indicator of Essence is not unexpected, as within the IDEAS process one of the first workshops that a school community undertakes together is that of a 'history walk'(Andrews & Associates, 2011). The history walk enables the whole school community to celebrate their past and capture the most significant events, images and understandings of who they are as a community. It is upon these understandings that the vision for a desired future starts to take shape.

The third of these new insights led to Indicator of Essence 12 but is also linked back to Indicator of Essence 11. Often specific symbols have meaning for a community and these may become incorporated into the new direction chosen, thereby bringing the past and placing it within the future, thus connecting generations of learners within a school community. Sunny Field's imagery of the bottle tree and people holding hands is an image from their past; Forrester Hills' metaphor of the Jacaranda tree was important to parents as it was their one treasured means of linking to a

limited past; and, St. Monica's vision wording 'From this hill we will soar', as mentioned previously, is directly related to the departing words of the last Mercy Sister to lead the school.

It is not just the visual images from the past that matter because current visuals help to bring others 'on board'. Indicator of Essence 12 was derived primarily from each of the New Teacher reflections in particular. Each had mentioned how they felt connected to the 'culture' of their new school, by ways of thinking and working within their school that were reinforced by imagery and other visual reminders. Such multifaceted texts also helped to clarify meanings and align practices across the school community as a whole. This understanding is captured in Indicator of Essence 12.

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**Indicator of Essence 12 – Visual representations of culture contribute to sustainability of quality practice**

Visual reinforcements of vision and culture are important in maintaining connections and understandings across a school community over an extended period of time.

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The final Indicator of Essence to be confirmed at this point was Indicator of Essence 13 which relates to the importance of parallel leadership. Within Table 5.6 the concept of parallel leadership could be seen reoccurring within each school's summarised themes. When seen in conjunction with the multifaceted texts tables, the images of teachers sharing with their peers and leading the learning of others made this really stand out as being reality rather than rhetoric. These schools had become learning communities where staff contributed and led as the need arose. The Big Picture understandings and shared mental maps consciously reinforced by metastrategic principal leadership built the capacity in others to step forward which in turn ensures sustainability of practice and procedure.

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**Indicator of Essence 13 – Parallel leadership strengthens community and pedagogy**

Metastrategic leadership coupled with teacher leadership leads to improved pedagogy, stronger collegial relationships and supportive networks capable of being sustained over time.

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### 5.9.1 Shared themes within a school's language-in-use

Finally, the themes from the Table 5.6 were brought together as shared themes from each school context. Additional themes that had appeared within the 'brief reflection' section at the end of each *narrative of significance* were combined with understandings reinforced by the multifaceted texts. All were then presented within three final tables – Tables 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12. Each of these tables sums up the most significant themes from one of the schools. Table 5.10 therefore summarises the shared themes from Sunny Fields, Table 5.11 summarises the shared themes from Forrester Hill, and Table 5.12 summarises the shared themes from St. Monica's. As an introduction to each tabled summary of shared themes is a brief description of any role specific themes emergent from that school's participants.

Within each table, where a portion of wording is separated by a forward slash, it indicates overlapping of ideas. These collations became integral to the next step of the reduction process; however, themes already identified as an Indicator of Essence, such as parallel leadership, were not included within the themes carried forward. Within Chapter 6, the key elements from these three final tables within Chapter 5 were collated into holistic themes. To illustrate the idea of there being key elements within themes, the three tables show the key elements as blue text.

In the case of Sunny Fields all three staff members echoed each other's thinking to some degree, therefore no role specific themes stand out as being significant. At Sunny Fields the most noticeable point of difference would be the extent to which metastrategic thinking dominated the Principal's transcript.

Table 5.10 Shared themes at Sunny Fields

| **Sunny Fields summary of shared themes and key elements** |
| --- |
| **Themes from Table 5.6**<br>• **Taking and making opportunities to learn together** (literacy training/book selection)<br>• **Building strong relationships**/ **IDEAS protocols**/Working in learning partnerships/ Improving practice through community partnerships/all on the same page<br>• Making decisions collectively/Creating **collective commitment**<br>• Reinforcing **direction with reference to vision, values & SWP reminders**/ Making a journey towards alignment/ **Aligning practice** to schoolwide pedagogical principles *(Cognitive connections)*<br>• Targeting teaching **priorities identified from data**/ Focussing on **attaining shared goals**<br>• **Sending cultural messages** through imagery/Keeping records of the journey<br>• **Celebrating success** /success breeds success/**achieving shared goals empowers**<br>• **Reflecting on practice**/Sharing successes and failures openly/**professional conversations** Empowering practices/**Building capacity**/ Strengthening practice/Utilising staff strengths<br>• **Establishing clear guidelines/ clear messages**<br>• **Strength in parallel leadership**/Promoting parallel leadership/ Parallel leadership<br>• Placing students first/Committing to student success/ **articulating needs**/**smooth transitions/authentic learning** across school for students<br>• **Embracing change** – slowly/ Embracing & acting on **authoritative knowledge**/ahead of the change agenda<br><br>**Additional themes**<br>• The place **active learning** played within the pedagogical principles (authentic pedagogy)<br>• The need to really **listen to student and parent voice** (multiple voices)<br>• The blending of **metastrategic and pedagogical understandings**<br>• The sense of energy from **shared celebrations**<br><br>*Caution expressed by Principal: Open transparent sharing of pedagogy can be confronting* |

Legend: The blue writing refers to the key elements

At Forrester Hill role specific perspectives emerged. The New Teacher saw some of the underlying norms and assumptions that the Principal, Teacher and Teacher Leader now took for granted. Positivity, inclusivity and hope were promoted at every opportunity, differing opinions were encouraged and valued, and strong emphasis was placed on establishing strong values and high expectations. As Teacher Leader, I saw the need to acknowledge my own gifts and talents with the arts. As lead facilitator of the process, I had to be continually mindful of the needs of other staff. Facilitating deeper understandings to grow through

professional conversations saw the development of a strong learning community. The Principal showed pride in her staff and students, and in a metastrategic manner, explored the concept of change needing to be layered in order for it to become manageable.

**Table 5.11 Shared themes at Forrester Hill**

| Forrester Hill summary of shared themes |
|---|
| **Themes from Table 5.6**<br>• Connecting **systemic and context priorities**/ **Painting BIG Picture** understandings<br>• **Keeping the journey going**/Capturing the journey/Revisiting the journey/ Committing to school improvement/the **power of the process**<br>• **Building professional capacity**/ Staff growth/ **metastrategic & parallel leadership** partnership<br>• A sense of **empowerment** /**building quality relationships**/allowing others to lead<br>• **Reflecting** on self and others practice/ **Promoting pedagogical reflection**/asking the right questions<br>• Walking the journey with staff/ Journeying together and **all onboard**<br>• **Simplifying the messages**/ Conveying clear messages/Establishing clear direction<br>• Focussing on **student need**/Improve pedagogy improve outcomes/the **same page pedagogically**<br>• **Keeping vision, values & SWP upfront/** Connecting through metaphorical vision<br>• **Celebrating success**/**valuing strengths**/successes of all are celebrated<br>• **Receptiveness of the need to change** in order to improve<br><br>**Additional Themes**<br>• The place of **connecting learning to the outside** world within the pedagogical principles<br>• Shared pedagogy based on **authoritative understandings** (all on the same page/shared mental models)<br>• The **sense of being ahead** of systemic changes /**asking the right questions/data based**<br>• The importance of **student voice** and developing independent learners<br>• Teachers have the **choice to be committed** or not.<br>• The **importance of induction** through sharing 'our story' with new staff<br>• Strength of practice grows when **community networks** are established<br><br>*Caution: Exclusion is a choice but it is important to be aware of possible reasons* |

Legend: The blue writing refers to the key elements

At St. Monica's the Principal saw her role as the being to inspire and sell the need for change and the change process itself. She placed a strong emphasis on the spiritual roots upon which the school and its vision were built and this was more than borne out in the multifaceted texts. Metastrategically she saw the need to build capacity within her school both in relation to leadership and teaching. The Teacher Leader emphasised that it was necessary to proactively deal with

change by anticipating needs and evaluating data. While the New Teacher believed in adding value to her new school and authenticating the learning experiences of her students. Changing pedagogical focus saw her change the layout of the learning space within her classroom.

**Table 5.12 Shared themes from St. Monica's**

| **St. Monica's summary of shared themes** |
| --- |
| **Themes from Table 5.6**<br>• Giving **clear consistent messages**/**all on the same page**<br>• **Systemic priorities** within context/**BIG picture understandings** via Vision & SWP/**pride in collective journey**<br>• Listening to **student voice**/ Encouraging **student and parent voice**<br>• **Questioning is the key to learning**<br>• Building strong **collegial relationships** basis for creating a **learning community**/ Focussing on **expert practice (metacognition)**<br>• Facilitating **professional conversations**/ **authoritative literature**/Strength in the language itself/ Sharing **ownership of vision, values and SWP**/<br>• **Creating connections** and deep meanings/**sharing understandings** of best practice<br>• Capturing professional, spiritual and community **understandings in language**<br>• Developing 'we' - **collective commitment/ parallel leadership contagious**<br>• Bringing students and staff to shared understandings/Bringing others on board through **rich-metaphor & professional conversations**<br>• **Valuing individual** gifts and talents<br>• **Aligning practice and decision making**<br>• **Embracing change** with passion & commitment/ Being re-energised and re-engaged<br>• **Empowering practices are transferrable/** Empowering teachers with professional confidence<br>• **Student centred practice**<br><br>**Additional Themes**<br>• Through the simplicity of the rich-metaphors students **take their understandings to contexts outside** their own school environment.<br>• Rich-metaphors **simplify powerful concepts** such as 'metacognition'<br>• **Multifaceted texts convey shared meanings** connecting others to what they are hearing /**bringing in new staff**<br>• **Critical mass is a powerful force** for innovative changes in practice to occur. |

Legend: The blue writing refers to the key elements

Using these collated themes it was possible, within Chapter 6, to use the key elements (indicated by blue text), to reduce these themes into holistic ones across all data sites. However, before commencing the next chapter the 'Indicators of Essence' that had emerged throughout Chapter 5 were brought together as a summary of the understandings that had come to light in Part A of the Reduction process.

## 5.10 Summary of additional 'Indicators of Essence' from Part A of the Reduction Phase

The additional 'Indicators of Essence' added another dimension to that obtained in the Depiction Phase, as they were primarily related to the roles of the participant (ṈŦ, ŦŁ, P) rather than to a description of a school in a broader sense. I assumed there would be overlaps between the two sets of 'Indicators of Essence' but they remain untouched at this stage as they had yet to be combined, verified and confirmed as essence. The confirmation, or not, of these would be an essential component of the Reduction Phase Part B.

- **Indicator of Essence 7: The embedded nature of the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy is indicative of a unique cultural perspective which filters information**

  The vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles display an embedded presence within the filter sub-set collations indicating holistic significance, as they filter information coming in and going out of the school.

- **Indicator of Essence 8: School improvement is built on a foundation of strong relationships and commitment to community**

  Relationships are the key to whether positive change occurs, or not. It comes back to the protocols of 'no blame' and 'success breeds success'. It is quality relationships which form the basis of collective commitment and empowerment capable of driving any agenda forward.

- **Indicator of Essence 9: Alignment of thinking, acting and purpose across the board**
  Throughout all of the elements within Step 3 what stood out was the alignment of thinking and acting which was apparent in each school. Words of the leadership team were seen reflected in the words of classroom teachers and visa versa – albeit to varying degrees.

- **Indicator of Essence 10: Layered understandings create strength within language-in-use**

  Layered understandings create strength and are reinforced by unique metaphorically reinforced images and terminologies with many characteristics being relevant to role rather than context, and with many process terms being common in the language-in-use across all contexts.

- **Indicator of Essence 11: Authentic future direction built on respected shared past**

  Authentication of future direction is found in treasured aspects of a school combined with its community's past.

- **Indicator of Essence 12: Visual representations of culture contribute to sustainability of quality practice**

  Visual reinforcements of vision and culture are important in maintaining connections and understandings across a school community over an extended period of time.

- **Indicator of Essence 13: Parallel leadership strengthens community and pedagogy**

  Metastrategic leadership coupled with teacher leadership leads to improved pedagogy, stronger collegial relationships and supportive networks capable of being sustained over time.

With these additional indicators in mind the sense of 'Essence' finally coming into view intensified. The tables of themes collated for each school were to be the starting point for deducing the remaining essence. However, before progressing to Part B, the interpretations made from the reduction steps within Chapter 5 had raised a number of thoughts regarding the holistic nature of the language-in-use within these schools.

Most fundamental was the sense that the common language-in-use that participants within sites appeared to share had come about because of their 'IDEAS journey' towards school improvement. This journey was one that had seen some measure of collective commitment evolve as the journey progressed, until critical mass saw the majority of school personnel getting 'on board'. There were those less committed – but those who did commit to the journey towards school improvement did so because

of their basic concern and passion for learners and learning. They sought to improve their own pedagogical practices, as well as how they worked together as a team, to align quality teaching practices across the school. This challenge would not have been possible without strong relationships and the development of a parallel leadership team within each school.

As teachers strived, with each other and their communities, to improve student outcomes, professional conversations and collaborative goal focussed dialogue were central to the creation of shared understandings. The shared mental models created were strengthened by visual representations of a school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical framework, as these artefacts reinforced the mental maps that had led to their creation in the first place. It was these school specific artefacts and their unique metaphorical links (the mental stereo imaging) that gave each school's language-in-use its own flavour and 'commonalities' within context. It was each school's uniqueness that was 'owned' by, and a source of pride to each participant.

# CHAPTER 6 : FINDING ESSENCE
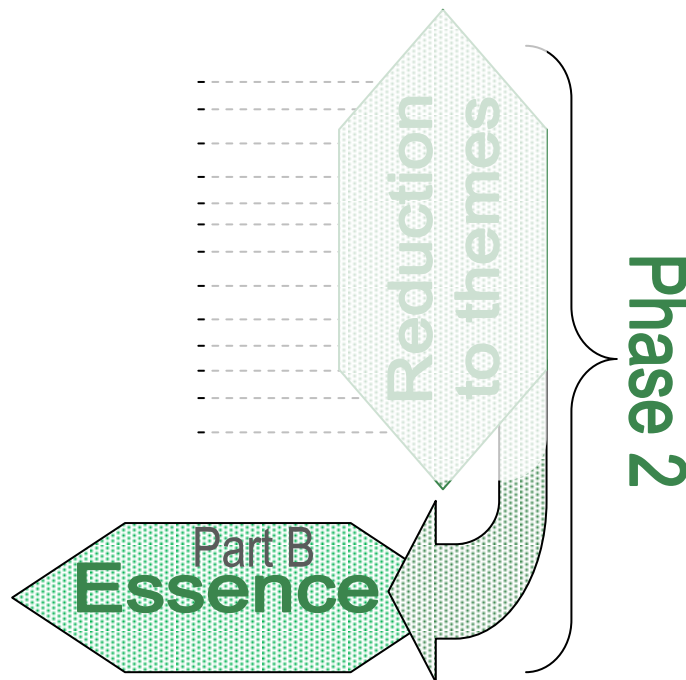


Figure 6.1 The Reduction Phase Part B

As indicated in Figure 6.1 within Part B of the Reduction Phase (Phase 2), the themes from the depiction were to be reduced to 'Essence'. Chapter 5 had brought to light knowledge indicating that each common, contextually specific language gave school personnel (even those new to a school), the means of thinking, articulating, interacting and building new knowledge relevant to their context. Each was a language construct that had evolved from a culture where time was taken to stop and think. Such spaces for reflection turned into 'Places' where double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974) could occur. The reflection spaces also enabled leadership teams to present layered understandings addressing the needs of all stakeholders. Change could thus be seen to be both necessary and manageable. The additional seven 'Indicators of Essence' uncovered, illustrated that within each context, the specific meaning systems had much in common. However, it was to be the Reduction Phase (Phase 2 Part B) that uncovered further indicators and reduced all of these to the 'Essence' of the phenomenon.

In order to find 'Essence' four steps were undertaken:

> Step 1: The reduction into holistic themes indicative of essence

> Step 2: Finding essence

> Step 3: Applying the s*pace into 'Place'* filtering process

> Step 4: Identifying essence

Before exploring these steps, it is important to clarify the place that Part B Step 3 plays in this reduction process. The emergent *space into 'Place'* filter had taken on greater significance than the other filters used within the Depiction Phase. With its emergence and application it became clear that not only was it a filter but it had additional characteristics indicative of 'Essence' (Chapter 4, Indicator of Essence 4). The understanding of this indicator in relation to physical space had been that a shared and neutral space was a place where relationships developed and therefore professional conversations could unfold which in turn would build cognitive connections. The compilations of themes within Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 also highlighted the uniqueness of the transformative process that had occurred as space turned into 'Place'. This is illustrated by the following extracts from the New Teacher perspectives (the school name is abbreviated in brackets) taken from Table 5.3:

- talk about a real journey towards alignment – *a concept related to the evolutionary nature of knowledge development and cognitive alignment* (SF)
- being open and honest in successes and failures – *unless a place of no blame has been established within collegial relationships then such a statement would not be possible* (SF)
- a community all on board but still willing to include others – *indicative of a shared understandings and cognitive place that is inclusive of new ideas* (FH)
- identifying that by providing students with access to the language allows them to *"share the understanding place"* (SM)
- Classroom environments themselves change in order to meet changing pedagogical needs – *the importance of space that facilitates learning and development* (SM)

Application of the *space into 'Place'* filter had drawn together understandings indicative of transformation. In many ways the filter itself had become transformed, as it had become an active filtering process, rather than a passive filter tool. As a process, it is applied in Part B of the Reduction Phase to add clarity to the 'Indicators of Essence' that emerge.

## 6.1 Step 1: The Reduction to Holistic Themes Indicative of Essence

From the shared themes within Tables 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12, the key elements that had been placed in bolded blue were used to again reduce themes down to a simpler list in order to compare themes across data sites. This had been done to some extent within Table 5.6, however, additional themes had appeared and been placed with the initial ones to produce Tables 5.10, 5.11 and 5.12. Key elements within these tables were then collated to form Tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3. Sunny Fields data from Table 5.10 were the starting point within this process.

The first table of key elements (Table 6.1) was that of Sunny Fields compiled from the blue wording of key elements within Table 5.10. Key elements were numbered from 1 to 22 and then similar elements were tracked across each of the other two schools (Tables 6.2 and 6.3).

The same number of key elements did not appear at each data site. At times more than one number is placed beside an element if there appears to be links to more than one key element from the Sunny Fields data. The numbered elements illustrate an alignment of intent across all data sites.

The data from Sunny Fields were the base point for comparison purposes. The key language elements that hold significant shared meanings at each school have been taken directly from Table 5.10 and the following was the list compiled for Sunny Fields:

1. making real learning opportunities
2. building strong relationships
3. direction with reference to vision, values & SWP
4. collective commitment

5. conveying cultural messages

6. aligning practice

7. priorities identified from data

8. recording the journey

9. celebrating success

10. achieving shared goals empowers

11. reflecting on practice

12. professional conversations

13. building capacity

14. clarifying guidelines and messages

15. strength in parallel leadership

16. articulating needs

17. smooth student transitions

18. embracing change

19. acting on authoritative knowledge

20. active learning pedagogy

21. listen to student and parent voice

22. metastrategic and pedagogical understandings

These 22 elements from the Sunny Fields data were used to create Table 6.1.The Forrester Hills' key elements from Table 5.11 were placed within Table 6.2, and St. Monica's key elements from Table 5.12 were presented within Table 6.3. However, there were elements that at first appeared to be unique to that site alone and these were highlighted in yellow within Tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3. These would later be confirmed, or not, by seeking supplementary evidence.

The links between the three tables are made by placing the corresponding number from the Sunny Fields key element against its counterpart within each of the other two tables. At times more than one number is placed beside a theme element as there were not 22 elements in each group and some of the additional ones appear to be subsumed within the existing set.

**Table 6.1 Key elements from shared themes at Sunny Fields**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center"><u>**Key elements from the shared themes SF**</u></td></tr>
<tr><td>1. making real learning opportunities</td><td>12. reflecting via deep professional conversations</td></tr>
<tr><td>2. building strong relationships</td><td>13. building capacity</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. direction with reference to vision, values and SWP (creating cognitive connections)</td><td>14.clarifying guidelines and messages</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. collective commitment</td><td>15. strength in parallel leadership</td></tr>
<tr><td>5. conveying cultural messages</td><td>16. articulating needs (student focussed teaching & learning)</td></tr>
<tr><td>6. aligning practice (shared goals)</td><td>17. <mark>smooth student transitions</mark></td></tr>
<tr><td>7.identifying priorities via data analysis</td><td>18. embracing change</td></tr>
<tr><td>8. recording the journey (maintaining school narrative)</td><td>19.acting on authoritative knowledge</td></tr>
<tr><td>9. celebrating individual and group success (acknowledgement)</td><td>20. active learning pedagogy</td></tr>
<tr><td>10. achieving shared goals empowers (success breeds success)</td><td>21. listen to student and parent voice (multiple voices)</td></tr>
<tr><td>11. reflecting on practice</td><td>22.metastrategic & pedagogical understanding (cognitive *space into 'Place'*)</td></tr>
</table>

The key elements were collated for each school in a similar manner and thus Table 6.2 and 6.3 were determined. The numbers placed before the elements in Tables 6.2 and 6.3 are the numbers that correlate by theme with the 22 numbered elements in Table 6.1. Some elements have more than one number indicating an overlapping of meaning between these elements.

**Table 6.2 Key elements from shared themes at Forrester Hill**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center"><u>**Key elements from the shared themes FH**</u></td></tr>
<tr><td>22. connecting systemic and context priorities</td><td>14. simplify the messages</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. <mark>keeping the journey going</mark>/maintaining culture</td><td>3. vision, values and SWP upfront (mental models cognitive *space into 'Place)'*</td></tr>
<tr><td>3.the power of process & conversation protocols</td><td>9. celebrating success</td></tr>
<tr><td>10. a sense of empowerment</td><td>18. receptiveness to change for improvement</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. building professional capacity (improve pedagogy improve outcomes)</td><td>12. 13. asking the right questions (data-based)</td></tr>
<tr><td>15. metastrategic and parallel leadership partnership</td><td><mark>being one step ahead of the game</mark></td></tr>
<tr><td>2. relationships -the foundation for learning</td><td>9. valuing strengths a culture of positivity</td></tr>
<tr><td>6.11. pedagogical reflection helps with</td><td>16. connect learning to the outside world</td></tr>
<tr><td>3. 5. 14. alignment of practice</td><td>1. creating community networks</td></tr>
<tr><td>4. all on board</td><td>19. authoritative understandings underpin practice</td></tr>
<tr><td>16. Student needs focus</td><td>21. student voice and independent learners</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><mark>the importance of induction</mark></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><mark>commitment is a choice</mark> <mark>commitment is a choice</mark></td></tr>
</table>

**Table 6.3 Key elements from shared themes at St. Monica's**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Key elements from the shared themes St. M's** | |
| 5. 6.14. consistent messages/ all on the same page | 19. authoritative readings base for conversations |
| 7. 22. awareness of systemic priorities and Big picture understandings | 9. valuing individual gifts and talents |
| 4. 8. pride in school culture & journey taken | 18. embracing the need to change/staff prepared to take risks |
| 21. hearing multiple voices | 20. opportunities for real world connectedness (authentic) |
| 11. questioning a key to learning ==metacognitive teaching== and ==learning== focus | ==strength in shared faith== |
| 2. strength inherent in a trust/ no blame culture | 12. sharing celebrations with community |
| 3. vision and SWP guide thinking and practice | 3. 5. rich-metaphors simplify concepts |
| 15. parallel leadership is contagious | 5. multifaceted texts convey shared meanings |
| 12. effective communication/professional conversations | 20. inside understandings into outside contexts |
| 16. student centred practice | 3. visuals remind staff of collective aspirations and expectations (benefits new staff) |
| | ==critical mass is a powerful force== |

At Sunny Fields, it was the element of 'smooth student transitions' at first appeared to have not been echoed in other contexts. At Forrester Hill the following appeared as contextually strong: being one step ahead of the game (also referred to once in the St. Monica's data); maintaining culture over time; commitment as choice; and the importance of induction. While at St. Monica's the unmatched elements were: metacognitive learning; strength in shared faith; and the concept of critical mass being a powerful force.

Once isolated in this manner, I realised that many of these were in fact present within the other schools' transcripts but were not articulated in quite the same manner. Therefore, proof was sought in order to confirm or discard these as holistic elements representative of themes indicative of essence.

**Smooth student transitions:** The *smooth student transitions* talked about in the Sunny Fields data were prominent in conversations primarily due to the small school context and the fact that teachers were in and out of each other's rooms on a regular basis. This allowed students to become familiar with all teachers in this small school. However, viewed holistically, this is part of pedagogical practice where alignment of focus and common pedagogical understandings improve outcomes for students. The choice made to allow such a shared and open approach was a conscious one made

with the best interest of the students in mind. In this regard there are clear correlations within the other two sites. At Forrester Hill the teacher speaks of "there is consistency of planning and detailed understandings now". She goes on to say "we all try and convey the same clear messages to kids". While at St. Monica's the Assistant Principal talks about being "all on the same page" and "reinforcing language and expectations with students and parents". The teacher leader at St. Monica's speaks of making "dedicated time to developing common understandings" giving our kids clear expectations "not room by room but across our school".

> **Indicator of Essence 14: Shared understandings and aligned pedagogy benefits student learning**
>
> The theme became an indicator of alignment as shared understandings assisted in the alignment of pedagogy providing students with consistent classroom practice schoolwide.

**Maintaining culture over time**: The Forrester Hill focus on maintaining a culture of school improvement over time is strongly identified within the school. This awareness features strongly within conversations held by the leadership team. At the time these data were collected the school had been on its IDEAS facilitated school improvement journey for approximately eight years. Over that time period there had been a complete change-over of the administration team and many staff members. Not one of the original IDEAS school management team remained at the school. After a period of relative stability from 2006 to 2009, in 2010 (the year that the final interviews were conducted), there had again been a large number of new staff enter the school as numbers grew and a number of staff retired or moved on. A thorough induction program had been put into action so that both new staff and new families to the school could be introduced to the school's vision, values and pedagogical principles. Therefore it was obvious as to why this concept of sustainability was so important at Forrester Hill, as was the belief in the importance of induction.

However, even within the other two contexts the conscious need of maintaining direction by upholding the vision was clear. The Principal at Sunny Fields talks about "revisiting the journey reinvigorates and refocuses the team for what comes next" and at St. Monica's the Principal talks about the power of the visuals to maintain "who we are…the banners are our creation just recently, we've tried to capture our vision so that when people come into our school…just the visuals tell

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them about who we are and what's happening here". However, although its validity had been proven this theme had already been subsumed within Indicator of Essence 12 'Visual representations of culture contribute to sustainability of quality practice' so did not warrant further consideration.

**Commitment as choice** was derived from the New Teacher's insight into the fact that a strongly collaborative culture could actually leave some people sitting "on the outside" and she saw this to be a personal choice. Although not mentioned in other contexts there were echoes of that concern within the Sunny Fields data when delving into the issues that the New Teacher had on her return to the school and find the open sharing and critique of teaching practices quite confronting. She appeared to accept this overtime but then found her place within the team. While at St. Monica's the Principal speaks of a critical mass as being a powerful force where teacher involvement and commitment encourages other teachers to become involved and committed. However, within Indicator of Essence 8 it states "School improvement is built on a foundation of strong relationships and commitment to community". Commitment is indicative of a choice being made and embraced. Therefore commitment as a choice and the concept of critical mass can be seen as fundamental to this Indicator of Essence and therefore did not need restating.

**Metacognitive learning** is an important aspect of learning clearly articulated at St. Monica's and yet not at the other two schools. However, if we consider the meaning of metacognition as 'thinking about thinking' or 'learning how to learn' there are echoes of this higher order level of thinking at each of the schools, both within the student cohort and the professional one. At Sunny Fields students have a learning journal in which, in their words, they record the progress they make and share with their parents. While the Principal talks about how "reflection has gone from being directed to being self-directed" and the teacher leader speaks of "fine-tuning our practice" and "we have confidence and information to back our beliefs". Within the Forrester Hill context the new teacher speaks of the language she hears in staff meetings as "being insightful – mindful of future needs" and the teacher leader speaks of "always having to seek the right questions to answer".

In many ways the concept of metacognition can therefore be linked to a mindfulness of the learner's thinking and learning processes. However, I believe that the

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mindfulness exhibited by these teachers is more than a solely metacognitive process. The Forrester Hill teacher speaks of being "responsive to student concerns – any concerns" and "empowering students", while at Sunny Fields the Principal speaks of students "needing to feel comfortable, encouraged" and the Teacher Leader talks of "looking for glimmers of positivity in students – something to praise". At St. Monica's the New Teacher says that "lessening students' sense of frustration" and "showing respect for different types of learners" are important. To me these teachers and leaders are showing a different type of mindfulness.

This form of mindfulness incorporates an understanding of the emotional and social needs of the learner as well as the cognitive awareness exhibited by the participants. It is the concept of cognitive awareness that is directly related to the concept of organisational cognisance where "collectively derived understandings and meanings are embedded in individuals thought processes in the form of a meta-mind and enhance cognitive connectivity between members of the professional community" (Jeyaraj, 2011, p. 176). Therefore a blending of these two concepts is used to create Indicator of Essence 15.

> **Indicator of Essence 15: Mindful cognitive awareness is built from collective reflective practice with 'mindful' being linked to social and emotional intelligence**
>
> Mindful awareness of self, student and collegial needs is developed through individual and collective reflective practice which builds the cognitive capacity to engage with new ideas and translate thoughts into action while at the same time supporting the learner and their holistic needs.

**Strength in shared faith:** The other highlighted area within the St. Monica's theme table was that of shared faith. This was contextually specific to the Catholic Education school context and not reflected within the state schools' data. Therefore the theme of shared faith was not included as an indicator of essence.

None-the-less exploring the faith theme led me to think of a theme that had not been captured as yet. This was the theme of passion which could be tied to commitment and yet I felt had overtones more dynamic and noteworthy. What emerged consistently across each data site was passion for students, passion for the journey travelled, passion for community and maintaining strong relationships within the

community, and passion to be the best teachers possible "because our kids deserve the best" (Forrester Hill Teacher).

> **Indicator of Essence 16: Passion for learners and learning focusses teaching on to the whole child**
>
> Part of the dynamism within these schools is their passion for improving student outcomes – not just cognitive ones but social and emotional as well. It is a passion for the 'whole child' and the 'whole community'.

## 6.1.1 Grouping shared key elements into 'Indicators of Essence'

Taking the shared key elements from Tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 it was possible to group these within overarching headings indicative of 'Essence'. It is primarily the wording taken from Table 6.1 that is used, as this was the data set that was numbered and used to track across the other two schools, however, occasionally slightly different wording indicates a blended terminology interpreted as being truer to the intent of the combined meanings.

> **Indicator of Essence 17: Defining pedagogical practices based on shared beliefs and identified need**
> - explicit teaching and learning focus based on data analysis
> - making and taking opportunities to build capacity in staff and students
> - deep professional conversations are the key to teachers' aligning quality practice and high expectations across a school

> **Indicator of Essence 18: Recognition that change is equivalent to opportunities to improve**
>
> - embracing change to improve outcomes
> - authoritative knowledge underpinning pedagogical practice

**Indicator of Essence 19: Rich-metaphors related to a school's vision align understandings, create new meaning and point the way to sustainable practice**

- schoolwide pedagogical understandings strengthened by metaphorical vision assists rapid uptake of new knowledge and allows teachers to embrace change by tying the new to the familiar (cognitive connections)
- rich-metaphors are a powerful tool for creating cognitive connections and generating new ideas
- staff end up all on the same page
- conscious of maintaining school narrative

**Indicator of Essence 20: Quality relationships across a whole school community are central to improving student outcomes and sustainability**

- quality relationships are central to lasting improvement occurring
- valuing and celebrating individuals/success breeds success

**Indicator of Essence 21: Integrated metastrategic and pedagogical understandings provides strength and positions collaborative thinking towards an acceptance of change**

- mix of metastrategic & pedagogical understanding (cognitive *space into 'Place'*)
- parallel leadership provides continuity in the face of change

**Indicator of Essence 22: Shared understandings and aligned pedagogy creates consistency for students**

- sharing understandings is essential to aligning pedagogy and providing students with consistent classroom practice schoolwide.

## 6.1.2 'Indicators of Essence' reduced to Essence Descriptors

All 'Indicators of Essence' taken from the summaries at the end of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 were collated by their main descriptor alone and combined as a list of 22 'Indicators of Essence'.

**The 22 Indicators of Essence**

1. Embarking on a continuous learning journey leads to school improvement
2. Sharing mental models leads to the possibility of collective action
3. Building the present on the past strengthens future direction
4. Evolving *space into 'Place'* is evidence of a learning culture
5. Risk-taking is fed by trust and a no blame environment
6. A contextually created language is an artefact of cognitive place and should not be taken for granted
7. The embedded nature of the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy is indicative of a unique cultural perspective which filters information
8. School improvement is built on a foundation of strong relationships and commitment to community
9. Aligning thinking, acting and purpose across the board is facilitated by a strong vision.
10. Layered understandings create strength within language-in-use
11. Authentic future direction is built on respected shared past
12. Visual representations of culture contribute to the sustainability of quality practice
13. Parallel leadership strengthens community and pedagogy
14. Shared understandings and aligned pedagogy benefits student learning
15. A passion for learners and learning focuses teaching onto the 'whole child'
16. Clearly defined pedagogical practices should be based on shared beliefs and identified need
17. Recognising that change is equivalent to opportunities to improve enables schools to embrace change
18. Rich-metaphors related to a school's vision align understandings, create new meaning and point the way to sustainable practice
19. Quality relationships across a whole school community are central to improving student outcomes and sustainability
20. Integrating metastrategic and pedagogical understandings provides strength and positions collaborative thinking towards an acceptance of change
21. Sharing understandings and aligning pedagogy creates consistency for students
22. Mindful cognitive awareness is built from deeply reflective practice

These 22 indicators were then re-evaluated for overlapping ideas and blended together as a collation of blended indicators within Table 6.4. Within Table 6.4 these blended indicators were articulated as one statement indicative of a final description of a particular component of 'Essence' named as an 'Essence Descriptor'. Each 'Essence Descriptor' describes one aspect of 'Essence', and in so doing reveals the essence of this language phenomenon. For example:

- Essence Descriptor I directly related to the first of the 22 'Indicators of Essence'. A 1 was been placed beside it indicating its link to the numbered position within the previous list. There were no other particular 'Indicators of Essence' that were related to it.
- Essence Descriptor II was a combination of 'Indicators of Essence' 3 and 11. Indicator of Essence 3 related to building the present on the past, while 11 referred to authentic direction built on a respected past. These were therefore combined to produce "the development of authentic direction is essential for school improvement to occur" and numbers 3 and 11 were placed beside this to indicate a blending of indicators.

Therefore, Table 6.4 depicts the resultant blendings as one statement followed by a definition of what each entails. The left hand column shows each new identity as an Essence Descriptor followed by a Roman numeral. The 'Indicators of Essence' related to each essence descriptor are placed beside the numeral. At times only one indicator of essence is listed and at other times there may be two or more.

Table 6.4 Indicators into Essence Descriptors

| Essence Descriptors | Indicators combined into one definition for each descriptor of essence |
|---|---|
| **I** (1) **The capacity to improve is built on strong relationships and a collective commitment to embrace change** | Embarking on a 'never ending learning journey' is a state of collective mind positioning that facilitates the embracing of challenges, one small step at a time, while end goals are continually relocated as needs change. |
| **II** (3 & 11) **The development of authentic direction is essential for school improvement to occur** | Authentic future direction is built on respecting the past, valuing the present while looking to the future. Authentic direction is built on quality schoolwide relationships and collegial sharing (the attributes of a learning community). |

| | |
|---|---|
| **III** (4, 5, 8 & 20) **The evolution of** *space into 'Place'* **occurs at a physical, relational &cognitive level** | The evolution of *space into 'Place'* is based on trusting and collective risk-taking related to facilitating school improvement and happens at a physical, relational and cognitive level. |
| **IV** (was 6) **A contextually specific language is an artefact of cognitive place** | A contextually created language is an artefact of cognitive place and its import should not be taken for granted – recording the journey enables it to be revisited and keeps the meaning system alive. |
| **V** (was 7) **Easily identifiable cultural filters help to make meaning** | The embedded nature of the vision, values and SWP is indicative of a unique cultural perspective filtering information coming in and going out. |
| **VI** (9, 10, 14 & 20) **A complex blend of metastrategic & pedagogical thinking exists within strong parallel leadership teams** | A shared meaning system is built on multi-layered and at times role specific metastrategic and pedagogical understandings which strengthen organisational alignment of thinking and acting. |
| **VII** (12 & 16): **Rich cultural metaphors contribute to sustainability of culture and best practice** | Visual representations of cultural metaphor (vision and SWP) contribute to alignment and the sustainability of quality practice by focussing reflective practice onto the agreed things that matter. |
| **VIII** (2, 17, 18, 14 & 21) **Shared mental models create cognitive alignment and consistency of practice** | Deep professional conversations create shared mental models based on vision, values and SWP helping staff to improve holistic student outcomes by identifying the need for changes in pedagogical direction and provide students with safe, smooth, learning journeys. |
| **IX** (16 & 19): **Mindfulness is integral to building strong professional partnerships for school improvement** | Listening to multiple voices creates a mindful awareness of self, student and collegial learning needs developed through collective reflective practice building on cognitive capacity that translate thoughts into action. |
| **X** (15 & 22): **Passion for the "whole child" is the dynamic that drives commitment to change** | A passion for learners and learning contributes to the dynamism within a school and is manifested as commitment to improving holistic student and community outcomes. |
| **XI** (13 & 20) **Parallel leadership strengthens professional community and pedagogical practices** | Strong parallel leadership contributes to school improvement by building the capacity of others to lead and the confidence to share their gifts, talents and 'best practice' with others |

## 6.1.3 Checking for further Essence Descriptors

Although the steps followed in order to name each 'Essence Descriptor' had been fruitful, I feared that the 'whole' view may have been compromised by the narrowing down process. The shared themes across schools that had been captured in Table 5.6 had been explored in some detail. I felt that by comparing the 11 essence descriptors

against the theme reductions in Table 5.6 (located within section 5.2.2), I could verify these before moving on to finally determining essence. Table 6.5 was devised using the elements within Table 5.6 (plus the few additional key points colour coded within section 5.7.5) and then plotting beside them the Roman numeral indicative of one of the 11 Essence Descriptors capable of encompassing that particular element. Where there were elements that had been listed one after another separated by a forward slash, these linked elements were reduced down to one explanation per element.

Therefore within Table 6.5, it can be seen that Essence Descriptor XI with its description of how *parallel leadership strengthens a professional community and its pedagogical practices* can be found linked to the following elements within the table: empowering practices (Sunny Fields Þ); building parallel leadership (Forrester Hill Þ); allowing others to lead (Forrester Hill ŦŁ); and growing parallel leadership capacity (St. Monica's ŦŁ). All 11 Essence Descriptors were mapped across the matrix in this manner.

Table 6.5 verified the 11 descriptors already articulated but in so doing brought to light that the element indicated by the highlighted words "giving clear consistent messages", "sending clear messages through imagery", conveying clear messages", and "simplifying the messages" did not quite fit within the current eleven essence descriptors. There were certainly links to Essence Descriptor V (cultural filters create meaning), VII (metaphors contribute to continuity of meaning) and even VIII (shared mental models) but they did not quite portray the clear message about "clear messages". Seeing that the importance of conveying clear messages within a school had not been adequately captured it was necessary to articulate another descriptor and thus Essence Descriptor XII came into being

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**Essence Descriptor XII: Verbal and visual messages should be clear, concise consistent and accessible to all**

It is important to transmit clear, concise messages which help to align cognition and action across the whole school community. Therefore the messages have to be able to be conveyed in ways that students through to adults can easily understand.

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**Table 6.5 Revisiting Table 5.6 to check for coverage of Essence Descriptors**

| Context | Principal | Teacher Leader | New Teacher |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Sunny Fields**  | XI Empowering practices/Building capacity<br>II Clear guidelines systemic & school<br>XI Developing parallel leadership<br>VII Reflecting builds future direction<br>I Building strong relationships<br>==Sending clear messages through imagery==<br>IX Embracing change - slowly<br>VI Building & utilising staff strengths<br>IV Keeping records of the journey | VI Targeting teaching priorities<br>VIII Strengthening practice<br>XI Parallel leadership<br>IX Placing students first<br>VII Working & reflecting in learning partnerships<br>X Making decisions collectively<br>II Reinforcing direction with vision, values & SWP<br>IX Embracing & acting on new knowledge | IX Committing to student success<br>III Making a journey towards alignment<br>VI Focussing on attaining shared goals<br>VIII Supporting practice through partnerships<br>XI Promoting parallel leadership<br>X Sharing successes and failures openly<br>X Creating collective commitment<br>VI Aligning practice to schoolwide pedagogical principles |
| **Forrester Hill**  | II Establishing clear direction<br>II Connecting systemic and context priorities<br>XI Building parallel leadership<br>VI Building professional capacity<br>X Showing pride in staff & students<br>VII Reflecting on self and others practice<br>IX Embracing change through layering change<br>II Walking the journey (authentic leadership)<br>==Simplifying the messages== | II Keeping the journey going<br>==Conveying clear messages==<br>X Acknowledging own gifts & talents<br>IX Being mindful of others needs (a conduit)<br>VII Promoting pedagogical reflection<br>Focussing on student need/Improving outcomes<br>VIII Facilitating deeper understandings/<br>V Keeping vision, values & SWP upfront<br>XI Allowing others to lead | II Empowering staff /building quality relationships<br>X Celebrating success<br>IX Differing opinions are valued<br>III Journeying together and all onboard<br>V Connecting through metaphorical vision<br>X Committing to school improvement<br>I Promoting positivity, inclusivity and hope at every opportunity/quality relationships<br>VI Establishing strong values and high expectations |
| **St. Monica's**  | X Selling the process<br>==Giving clear consistent messages==<br>II Systemic priorities within context<br>II BIG Picture filtered via Vision & SWP<br>IX Listening to student voice<br>III Questioning is the key to learning<br>III Building strong collegial relationships<br>VIII Facilitating professional conversations<br>Spiritual roots brings community together<br>IX Nurturing others to grow<br>II Clear understandings of where to next | VII Sharing ownership of vision, values and SWP<br>XI Growing parallel leadership capacity<br>VI Creating connections and deep meanings/sharing understanding of best practice<br>VI Focussing on expert practice (metacognition)<br>X Dealing proactively with the need for change<br>X Empowering teachers with professional confidence<br>IX Encouraging student and parent voice<br>II Capturing professional, spiritual and community understandings in language | X Being re-energised and re-engaged<br>X Developing 'we' - collective commitment<br>III Bringing students to shared understandings<br>VIII bringing others on board through rich-metaphor & quality conversations<br>X Valuing individual gifts and talents<br>VI Authentic learning going beyond the classroom<br>VIII Aligning practice and decision making<br>X Embracing change with passion & commitment<br>III Changing environments to match pedagogy<br>VIII Empowering practices are transferrable |

It could be said that Essence Descriptor XII is closely linked to Essence Descriptor V, "easily identifiable cultural filters help to make meaning", or to Essence Descriptor VII, "rich cultural metaphors contribute to sustainability of culture and best practice", however, the focus within XII is on accessibility to meaning. In other words choosing and using rich-metaphors, cultural symbolism and wording that can help simplify, as well as enrich and deepen understandings. This makes it possible for individuals, regardless of age, position or ability, to share a sense of identity centred on unique school characteristics linked to a school's vision and shared pedagogical beliefs.

## 6.2 Step 2: Finding Essence

Finally, the full set of Essence Descriptors was revealed and essence could be clarified. The final set of twelve Essence Descriptors is as follows:

I.   The capacity to improve is built on strong relationships and a collective commitment to embrace change.

II.   The development of authentic direction is essential for school improvement to occur.

III.   The evolution of *space into 'Place'* occurs at a physical, relational and cognitive level.

IV.   A contextually specific language is an artefact of shared cognitive place.

V.   Easily identifiable cultural filters help to make meaning.

VI.   A blend of metastrategic and pedagogical thinking is evidenced in strong parallel leadership teams.

VII.   Rich cultural metaphors contribute to sustainability of culture and best practice.

VIII.   Shared mental models create cognitive alignment and consistency of practice.

IX.   Mindfulness is integral to building strong professional connections upon which school improvement can be built.

X.   Passion for the "whole child" is the dynamic that drives commitment and acceptance of the need to change.

XI.   Parallel leadership strengthens both professional community and pedagogy.

XII.    Verbal and visual messages should be clear, concise, consistent and
        accessible to all.

With these descriptors in mind, what was the essence of a language that assisted a
school community to embrace change, develop quality relationships, agree on
authentic direction, function at three levels of *space into 'Place'*, create mental
models of shared meaning (cognitive place), and blend metastrategic and
pedagogical thinking? What was it about the language-in-use within these three
schools which pointed towards sustainability, alignment, consistency, mindfulness of
need, and passion for the 'whole child', while at the same time echoing parallel
leadership in action, and a clear sense of direction, through the concise consistent
messages being given?

So much of what had been identified as present within each meaning system
appeared directly related to the school culture itself. It was a meaning system that
had been created by each school community and facilitated by the IDEAS process
itself. It was within this meaning system as a whole that the essence of this
phenomenon could be found.

A system can be defined as "a set of components that work together for the overall
objective of the whole" (Haines, 2000, p. 2). Thus within each of these schools
meaning was created by a whole interconnected system of ways of working,
thinking, reflecting and acting which were accepted as being the norm within each
interconnected network called school. Each network clearly possessed its own
distinguishing cultural artefacts and yet there were many traits that were shared.
These dual traits seemed to be best represented by the concept of culture and how
within a common culture there are also sub-cultures.

At this point I revisited Schein's (1993) understanding of organisational culture as
being

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved
> its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has
> worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to

new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 212)

How did Schein's insights into culture relate to what had been identified in each of these schools? How was school culture evident within the language-in-use? Were there correlations between Schein's understanding of culture and what was seen as evidence of school culture within the data? In fact what exactly was the makeup of each cultural level to which Schein refers?

- At the 'artefacts level', Schein sees these as the surface manifestations of culture – what people hear, see and possibly touch – which are manifested visibly in  products, posters, art works, technologies, mannerisms, speech characteristics and the like. He sees these as easy to observe but difficult to decipher.

- At the 'espoused values level', a group reflects and explores their values and beliefs so as to bring into the open the influences that currently impact on decision making and practice. The leader of the group facilitates these initial conversations and shared values over time become shared assumptions. By exploring openly the 'things that matter' validation by the majority occurs and collective focussing on shared goals takes place.

- At the 'basic assumptions level', it is the patterns of practice that are returned to when problems arise; the creation of new contextually specific knowledge from new learnings; and shared understandings as to how reflection, re-evaluation and change will be carried out, that illustrates what the group pays attention to as being important.


Within the three schools at the centre of this research these three cultural levels can be identified from the data. The collectively created visions, values and schoolwide pedagogical frameworks reflected individual aspects from within each context and were proudly displayed on walls, websites, pamphlets, student workbooks, reflective journals and in the ways rooms were set up in order to enhance pedagogical practice.

The artefacts so proudly on display within each school's multifaceted texts were specific to each setting – unique to each culture:

- A *valley of opportunities* relates directly to the long tradition of farming within the Sunny Fields' community and the environment that surrounds the school, while the bottle tree on the emblem reflects the many bottle trees planted within its grounds.

- *Growing together* in conjunction with the image of the *Jacaranda Tree* was treasured by the founding parents at Forrester Hill and Jacaranda trees adorn the grounds.

- *From this hill* were words spoken by the last Mercy Sister to be principal at St. Monica's and the school is indeed built on a hill overlooking the suburb in which is situated.

Each school's set of schoolwide pedagogical principles is both an artefact of school culture and a well defined link to espoused values, captured as principles, which both staff and community see as being exemplary teaching practices and the best way to work together to achieve quality outcomes for students. The SWP frameworks were derived by each school staff in order to meet the needs of their specific student cohort but in general are recognisable as quality pedagogical principles within any context:

- The wording of the KITES pedagogy (Knowledge, Innovation, Taking Risks, Empowerment and Success) can be seen to be unique to St. Monica's and yet refers broadly to metacognition as a higher order thinking tool, creativity, 'having a go', high expectations, personal development and achieving success.

- The SMARTS pedagogy at Sunny Fields refers broadly to student centred pedagogy in a multi-age context, where hands on 'active learning' meets the needs of individuals. There is an emphasis on creativity, team building, setting high expectations and higher order thinking activities within a caring environment.

- At Forrester Hill "Growing Together, Learning Forever, Supporting Each Other" relates to risk taking in a supportive environment, building personal

and people skills, exploring learning through substantive conversations and higher order thinking tasks connected through to the students' world while being supported by strong relationships.

Further espoused values can be identified by the values themselves within each school and more particularly in the structures in place such as parallel leadership and shared decision making, both attributes of which are shared across all contexts (Schein's Cultural Level 2). Finally, at the deep and meaningful level of underlying assumptions, over time and independently developed within each of these schools, collaborative and cohesive ways of working had become accepted and expected practice (Schein's Cultural Level 3). These practices revolved around a number of the attributes identified within this investigation and link to the concepts of a no blame environment, deep professional conversations, the acceptance that leadership is distributed and most especially on the importance of quality relationships and clearly articulated shared goals.

From an holistic view, within these schools there were strong elements or basic assumptions found within a common culture – these were the elements related to the IDEAS process itself – while at the same time there existed school specific artefacts and ways of working. Many of the shared basic assumptions were built from engagement with the process itself. They are closely linked to the IDEAS principles of practice: teachers are the key, professional learning is key to professional revitalisation, success breeds success, alignment of school processes is a collective responsibility, and no blame (Crowther & Associates, 2011). It is from this ground of commonality that individuality was able to flourish.

## 6.2.1 Essence and culture

Within Schein's levels of culture, the artefact level refers to surface manifestations of culture such as images, artworks, dress, general behaviours, words, ways of speaking, structures and similar concrete objects. Schein saw these traits as being easily discernable but difficult to understand without background knowledge. At the espoused values level lie the conscious strategies, goals and philosophies that are articulated in written and verbal form across the organisation. However, it is at the assumptions level that the reality of organisational life unfolds. This level can be

seen to be the core or essence of organisational life (Owens, 2004; Schein, 1992). At this deeper level these cultural attributes exist to a large extent at a subconscious level and are difficult to discern – and yet these are the drivers of action and thinking within the organisation (Schein, 1992). Schein (2004) sees even the climate of the organisation as "an artefact of the deeper cultural levels, as is the visible behaviour of its members" (p. 26).

At these deeper levels shared meanings (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) mental models, collective ways of working and clearly evidenced linguistic paradigms guide perceptions, thought, and the format that the language-in-use takes within a group situation. These are what Schein (2004) speaks of as "shared cognitive frames" (p. 13) utilised by a community and taught to new members of the community during induction and socialisation processes.

With these understandings in mind I then revisited the 12 essence descriptors to see the relationship between these and the shared cognitive cultural frames evidenced in the data. An explanation of each Essence Descriptor and its relationship to one of Schein's cultural levels has been included. The cultural level was placed at the end of the grouping to indicate the correspondence between the descriptor and Schein's levels of culture.

- **Essence Descriptor I:** The capacity to improve is built on strong relationships and a collective commitment to embrace change.
  *Changing mindsets create new mental models (Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor II:** The development of authentic direction is essential if school improvement is to occur. It is built on respecting the past while looking to the future.
  *The importance of valuing past, present and people (Values and Beliefs Level plus Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor III:** The evolution of *space into 'Place'* occurs at a physical, relational and cognitive level.
  *Changing mindsets and challenging assumptions so that double-loop learning can occur (Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor IV:** A contextually specific language is an artefact of cognitive place. Its importance should not be taken for granted – recording the journey enables it to be revisited and keeps the meaning system alive. *A concrete manifestation (Artefacts Level) of the 'who' and 'what' of each school's ways of thinking and acting according to espoused values (Values and Beliefs Level 2).*

- **Essence Descriptor V**: Easily identifiable cultural filters help to make meaning. The embedded nature of the vision, values and schoolwide pedagogy is indicative of a unique cultural perspective which filters information coming in and going out.
  *Artefacts (Artefacts Level 1) used to reflect and define, and re-define values and principles (Values and Beliefs Level 2).*

- **Essence Descriptor VI:** A blend of metastrategic and pedagogical thinking is evidenced in strong parallel leadership teams. Shared understandings are multi-layered, and at times role specific. Metastrategic and pedagogical understandings strengthen school wide alignment of thinking and acting.

  *Mental models drawn from reflective practice are evidence that double-loop learning has occurred. Mental models are created from accepted ways of working and shared assumptions (Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor VII:** Rich cultural metaphors contribute to sustainability of culture and best practice. Visual representations of cultural metaphor (vision and SWP) align and contribute to sustainability of quality practice.

  *Physical artefacts (Artefacts Level 1) have significance both for those who created them and for those who are new to a school. Meanings must be revisited as values must be rearticulated so others can understand purpose (Values and Beliefs Level 2).*

- **Essence Descriptor VIII:** Shared mental models create cognitive alignment and consistency of practice improving holistic student outcomes by highlighting the need for changes in pedagogical direction to meet

identified needs and providing students with a safe, smooth, learning journey.

*Improvements in practice occur as fundamental beliefs about best practice change as new understandings come to light (Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor IX:** Mindfulness (a form of emotional and social intelligence) is integral to building strong professional connections upon which school improvement can be built. Listening to multiple voices creates a mindful awareness of self, student and collegial learning needs and is developed through collective reflective practice which builds the cognitive capacity to translate thoughts into action.

  *Double-loop learning lies at the heart of changing assumptions about 'what is good enough' and how to go about improvements (Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor X:** Passion for the 'whole child' is the dynamic that drives commitment and acceptance of the need to change. A passion for learners and learning contributes to the dynamism within a school which is reflected in the language-in-use and so drives the commitment to improving holistic student and community outcomes.

  *Shared belief in the value of collegial relationships and the importance of learning (Values and Beliefs Level 2) drives the commitment to improve practice (Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor XI:** Parallel leadership strengthens both professional community and pedagogy. Parallel leadership contributes to school improvement by building the capacity of others to lead and the confidence to share their gifts, talents and 'best practice' with others.

  *An underlying assumption by the metastrategic principal is that at times others should lead, an underlying assumption of the teacher leader is that they must lead the learning of others and that they themselves can make a difference with their contributions, an underlying assumption of the teacher and the leader is that anyone can lead as the need arises (Norms and Assumptions Level 3).*

- **Essence Descriptor XII:** Verbal and visual messages should be clear, concise and consistent in order to align cognition and action across the whole school community and so contribute to the establishment of a culture of openness and trust.

   *The messages are an essential component of all three levels. They are the visual and verbal representations of culture and meaning, the means of articulating values and beliefs, and are fundamental to the way in which people think, communicate and share practice. Language (in all its modes) is the means by which tacit assumptions can be made explicit and thus able to be shared, allowing sustainability of the things that matter to a school community (Levels 1, 2 and 3).*

## 6.2.2 Culture as a contextually created language

Within these data sites the basic assumptions are derived from a complex mix of the norms (Kilman & Saxton, 1983); the espoused values (Schein, 1992); the climate (Schneider, 1990); the shared cognitive frames which guide thinking and acting (Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 2004); and, the metaphors and cultural symbols (Geertz, 1973; Morgan, 1980, 1997) that these school communities hold dear. The underlying assumptions level is particularly manifested within the multifaceted texts of each contextually created language-in-use. Attentiveness to the language-in-use assists the observer/listener to gain a sense of what the underlying assumptions may be within each of these communities.

Within these schools the essence of their language-in-use is that it is a **C**ontextually **C**reated **L**anguage of **U**nderstanding and **E**ngagement (a CLUE ) that is both reflective of school culture and facilitative of change in school culture. The deep levels of understanding and engagement witnessed in these schools are directly related to the double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974) that has occurred partly facilitated by the IDEAS process itself and its university facilitators, and partly by the parallel leadership teams established within each school. It is this culturally created language that portrays the espoused theories between individuals (Argyris & Schön, 1974) and allows these to be shared and turned into collective theories in use

(Argyris & Schön, 1974). As such, a ⟨CLUE contributes significantly to the building of organisational capital (LRI, 2011).

Therefore, a ⟨CLUE can be defined as an artefact of a meaning making system which evolves over time through collective commitment to espoused values, as expressed within a school's vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles. It is the embodiment of underlying assumptions that both consciously and unconsciously are utilised within a school to align practice and focus on improvement within every facet of school life, thereby facilitating cognitive alignment between teaching professionals.

The presence of a ⟨CLUE is a major component of 'the lived experience' of each school member and as such is a *clue* to whether genuine school improvement has taken place. It is evidence of the development of a learning culture, at both a cognitive and relational level. Attentiveness to its unique characteristics may enable school leaders to maintain quality practices over time, as well as, to look forward with confidence to further improvements being made. It germinates within trusting relationships nurtured by a 'no blame' environment but grows to strength and maturity by passion and collective commitment to improvement. A ⟨CLUE functions at three levels:

The artefacts level:

- evidence of a lived vision

The espoused values level:

- clearly articulated values and schoolwide pedagogical principles
- values owned by the school community

The assumptions (cognitive frames or mental models) level:

- proactive and celebratory behaviours
- constantly evolving understandings and shared mental models as double-loop learning occurs
- mindful of individual strengths and needs
- unique to its context yet reflective of IDEAS protocols of practice

- a synthesis of systemic and community specific priorities
- reflective of a community's commitment to ongoing school improvement

## 6.3 Step 3: Applying the *space into 'Place'* Filtering Process

Within each school context, the places where understanding and engagement were created were built upon certain cultural prerequisites (either established prior to commencement of the IDEAS process or developed as the 'journey' got under way). The creation of place was essential to the emergence of a ⟨CLUE and its developmental stages were primarily sequential in nature. The cultural pre-requisites which are partly those of any professional learning community – relational trust, shared values and beliefs, ongoing commitment to learning and sharing, and a focus on quality practice (Hord, 1997a; Huffman & Hipp, 2007; Mitchell & Sackney; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007) – must also be contextually specific to form the framework that supports the formation of a ⟨CLUE. It is possible that without a unifying vision, although the prerequisites are in place, the movement onward and upward into a dynamic and powerful meaning making system may not occur. By combining knowledge of the essence descriptors with past knowledge related to the evolution of *space into 'Place'* (as captured in Chapter 4's Montage 4.2) it is possible to make a comparison between the evolution of a ⟨CLUE and the changing cultural characteristics emergent at each data site.

'Space' is seen to be the neutral physical, relational or cognitive starting point from which deeper collective understandings emerge. It is these deeper collective understandings that create the shared cognitive frames or mental models which equate to being the 'Place' where significant changes in pedagogical understandings take place. It is these changes which translated into practices within each school which were facilitated and supported by the parallel leadership team. It is these deep level changes that are capable of leading to on-going improvement.

What emerged from the application of the *space into 'Place'* filtering process is a model (Figure 6.2) depicting evolutionary factors related to the emergence of a ⟨CLUE and space into 'Place'. The model captures the fact that the contributors to growth in community and sense of purpose, the cultural indicators depicted as the

left-hand side of the growth pattern, reflect on and influence the growth of those on the right, both for individuals and the collective.
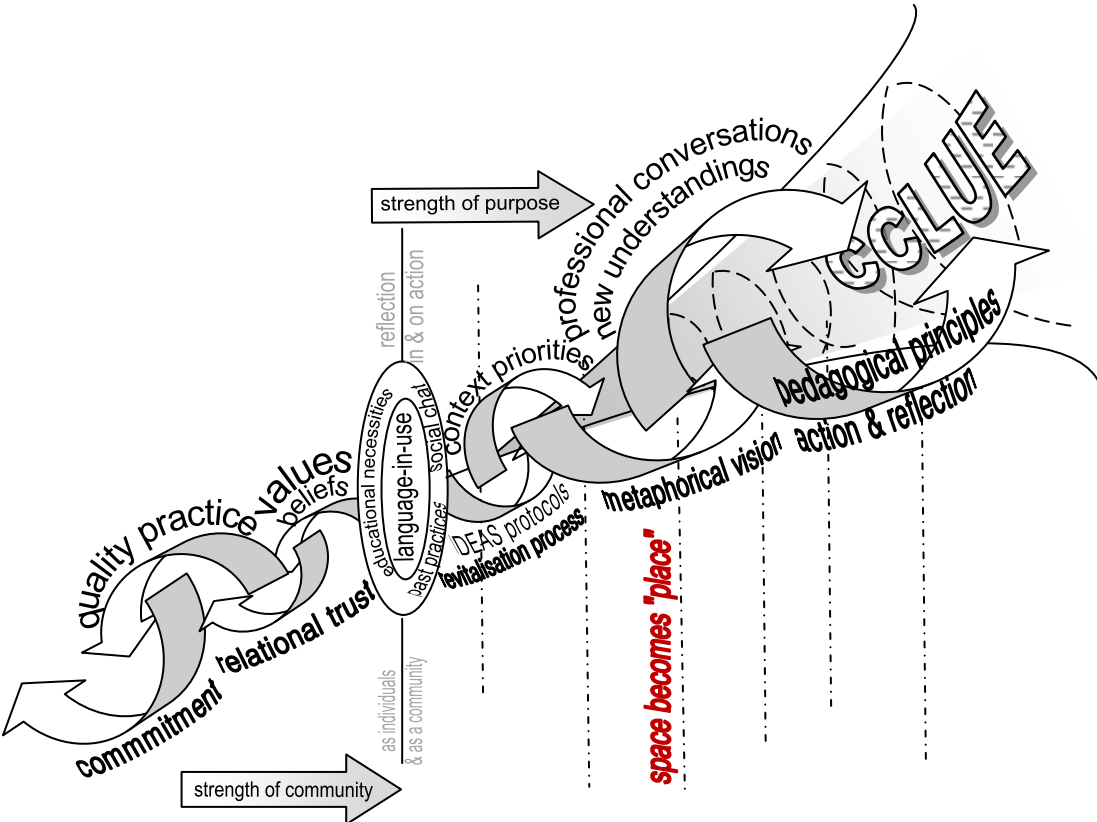


Figure 6.2 The model: The evolution of a CLUE and space into 'Place'

However, the model also indicates that some cultural prerequisites related *to strength of community* may exist without the accompanying evolution into a significant shared meaning system occurring through *strength of purpose*. For a CLUE to evolve other conditions for growth must come into play. What is evident within the model is the generative nature of the growth pattern that ensues.

## 6.3.1 The creation of space into 'Place' within the model

In order to fully unpack the filter *space into 'Place'* which had evolved throughout this investigation it was necessary to return and explore my understanding of this concept. I believe that every school space has the ability to become a place of collective understanding and community engagement, however, necessary cultural

prerequisites must be in place. Commitment and the 'right' kind of leadership were imperatives within these schools, as parallel leadership and shared responsibility created cultures where teachers and leaders were prepared to take risks and find solutions in creative ways to the change challenges faced within both short term and long term time frames (Crowther et al., 2009). Significant change is a long term process and it is only over a number of years that the school space may become a 'Place' of understanding, engagement and action where a $\subset$LUE can thrive. This cannot be rushed and is not guaranteed, as the many other growth factors to the left-hand side of the model must be in place.

## 6.3.2 Cultural transformation

Prior to IDEAS participants stated that little collective pedagogical understanding took place within the schools – understandings were primarily related to behaviour management and administrative requirements with staff relationships generally being congenial except at Forrester Hill State School where relationships were strained with various factions being in place which caused regular conflict situations to occur. Relationships between staff and those in leadership positions were also a concern at Forrester Hill but was not a concerning factor at either of the other sites.

There were varied community-school relationship combinations evident as well. At Sunny Fields, parent-school relationships were strained while at Forrester Hill State School parents trusted teachers to do their job and wanted nothing to do with the day-to-day running of the school. St. Monica's had close religious connections with their parish community and generally relationships were good, though at times points of contention would arise. Regardless of context, however, in all schools wider community connections for the purpose of improving educational outcomes could be described as non-existent and teachers rarely talked in any deep manner about their teaching principles or practices.

Teachers showed dependency on the administrative team to be the driving force behind any professional discussions or professional development initiatives. Due to circumstances beyond their control teachers at Forrester Hill State School lacked even that sense of security. Deep, critically constructive pedagogical conversations across the whole school did not take place. Each school lacked a clearly defined

sense of direction or focus and there was no vision for a way forward which meant that long term planning and goal setting was at the best arbitrary – or as in the Forrester Hill context – non-existent. The use of metaphors such as 'lost at sea' and 'no clear direction' illustrated the message portrayed about the culture of the past within this context.

Leadership was hierarchical and school leaders were usually the first point of 'blame'. When problems arose the negativity within Forrester Hill in particular was debilitating and destructive. Staff did not have a sense of collective responsibility for the students in the school. At all sites teachers were hard-working and displayed real concern for the students in their care but their concern was for the students in their individual classrooms rather than the cohort as a whole. Students were the recipients of teacher delivery of content and had little 'voice' within the school. Student behaviour had become a concern at Forrester Hill and Sunny Fields.

In the beginning, using the language of leadership was clearly the prerogative of the administration team or Principal at all sites. Teacher voice was listened to when it came to the day-to-day concerns of students and organisational issues such as playground duties, sporting teams, parent/teacher interviews and the like. As staff rarely had 'big picture' understandings of systemic directives or general educational concerns beyond the classroom, their potential to contribute to leadership and decision making was limited. Those individuals that had wider understandings would rarely contribute these in a group situation.

Even though for each school the sequence of a (CLUE development was similar, it is impossible to put a time line to the creation of the places where deep understanding transpired, as the starting point for each school was so different:

- Sunny Fields was a very small school and falling student numbers were a concern. Within a few months of starting the IDEAS journey staff numbers were reduced from three teachers to two. There was an uneasy truce between teachers and parents. The Principal found the enmity mentally draining but the relationship between the two remaining staff was

strong and the school benefited from the help of one teacher-aide with close
relationships to the community.

- Forrester Hill State School had commenced the IDEAS
  process after a period of leadership uncertainty, a rapidly
  increasing school population with changing demographics
  and mounting concerns about behaviours, all resulting in a
  lack of cohesion between staff and the growth of factions
  and power groups.

- St. Monica's was a close knit community held together by faith
  and close congenial relationships. According to the Principal,
  occasionally interactions with the parish council were not as
  the Principal had hoped for, but, compared to the other two
  schools involved in the current research project, relationships
  were sound. All school participants interviewed noted that the
  transformation from congenial relationships to collegial professional
  relationships between staff was the turning point in their journey towards
  school improvement. Until that cultural transformation took place little deep
  level change (the assumption level) occurred.

As depicted in Figure 6.3 milestones along the journey to the place where
understanding and engagement transpired are closely linked. These milestones fall
into a pattern related to the 'language-in-use' within each school at the 'before
IDEAS period', 'the early IDEAS period' and 'the current period'.



The evolution of a CCLUE culture

before IDEAS / after IDEAS / present

| Language-in-use as IDEAS commences: | Language-in-use during process development: | Language-in-use post formal IDEAS process: |
|---|---|---|
| • Discipline | • Big Picture | • Vision centred |
| • Organisation | • Shared Leadership | • Big Picture |
| • Congenial chat | • Discipline | • Data driven |
| • Blame | • Organisational Structures | • Parallel leadership |
| | • Congenial discussions | • Organisational processes |
| | | • Collegial professional conversations |
| | | • No Blame |
| static & repetitive | in a state of flux | dynamic & evolving |

Figure 6.3 The evolution of a CCLUE culture

The continuum of language-in-use corresponds to the development of 'Place' from space and the creation of a dynamic learning culture. The evolving characteristics of the meaning making system within use each school are the articulation of changes in school culture and capacity built.
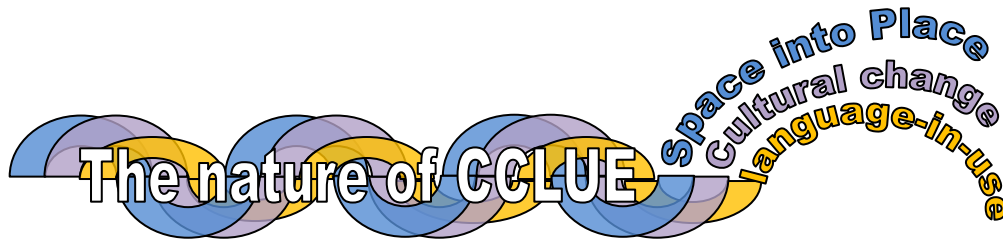


Figure 6.4 The entwined nature of a CLUE

Figure 6.4 indicates the entwined nature of these three strands and further clarifies the essence of the phenomenon in question.

## 6.4 Step 4: Identifying the Essence of the Phenomenon

This research has determined that a CLUE is a meaning making system indicative of a specific type of collaborative learning culture. It evolves over time through collective commitment to school vision. It is both consciously and unconsciously utilised to align practice and focus on improvement within every facet of the school, thereby transmitting both tacit and explicit messages concerned with on-going school improvement and making sustainability a possibility. It is a language characterised by hope, vibrancy and both context-specific and process-specific shared meanings.

The specific nature of the essence of a CLUE can be found in its descriptors which can be grouped according to its three main strands.

**Space into 'Place'**

- **Essence Descriptor 1:** The capacity to improve is built on strong relationships and a collective commitment to embrace change.

- **Essence Descriptor 3:** The evolution of *space into 'Place'* occurs at a physical, relational and cognitive level.

- **Essence Descriptor 8:** Shared mental models create cognitive alignment and consistency of practice.
- **Essence Descriptor 12:** Verbal and visual messages should be clear, concise and consistent.

**Cultural change**

- **Essence Descriptor 2:** The development of authentic direction is essential for school improvement to occur.

- **Essence Descriptor 9:** Mindfulness is integral to building strong professional connections upon which school improvement can be built.

- **Essence Descriptor 10:** Passion for the "whole child" is the dynamic that drives commitment and acceptance of the need to change.

- **Essence Descriptor 11:** Parallel leadership strengthens both professional community and pedagogy.

**Language-in-use**

- **Essence Descriptor 4:** A contextually specific language is an artefact of shared cognitive place.

- **Essence Descriptor 5**: Easily identifiable cultural filters help to make meaning.

- **Essence Descriptor 6:** A blend of metastrategic and pedagogical thinking is evidenced in strong parallel leadership teams.

- **Essence Descriptor 7:** Rich cultural metaphors contribute to sustainability of culture and best practice.

# 6.5 The Answer to Research Sub-Question 1

**Sub-Question 1. What are the fundamental characteristics of a contextually specific language in the lived experience of three Australian school communities that have undertaken a process of school revitalisation?**

The most fundamental characteristic of the contextually specific language in school communities that have undertaken the IDEAS process of school revitalisation is the generative nature of the three entwined components of Figure 6.4. These are *space into 'Place'* (which occurs at the physical, relational and cognitive levels), cultural change (as *space into 'Place'* creates new knowledge and collective commitment to change), and the language-in-use (that both reflects and facilitates the change processes at play).

The characteristics of this language construct are inextricably entwined. The language phenomenon illuminated by the lived experiences of the participants within this study demonstrates that the language is a Contextually Created language of Understanding and Engagement or a CLUE. (It is important to revisit the changing terminology that occurred throughout this study as it is indicative of a CLUE itself. In the original question the wording read as 'a contextually constructed language', however, the language-in-use was created by the changing cultural perspectives and the changing perspectives were facilitated by the language-in-use, therefore contextually created is a far more accurate nomenclature). A CLUE is not only significant in the 'life-world' of these school communities as they function currently, but is also a key to achieving the illusive attribute of sustainable school improvement over the long term, as evidenced at Forrester Hill State School.

Another key characteristic is the multilayered nature of a CLUE, as shown in Figure 6.3. There are elements of the language-in-use that relate to external factors such as families and societal influences. Across all schools, the language of the process itself could be clearly seen and heard – this was particularly evident by the consistent use of the language of the IDEAS principles of practice, as well as frequent references to schools' vision, values and SWP (Andrews et al., 2010). There are also general elements related to organisation, behaviour management or special needs but they are so much a part of the contextually created language of understanding and engagement that they are difficult to separate.

Basically the language-in-use has undergone a process of metamorphosis and emerged into a CLUE becoming the 'mirror to the soul' of which Palmer (2007) so eloquently speaks, however, this is the soul of a learning community, rather than the soul of an individual teacher.
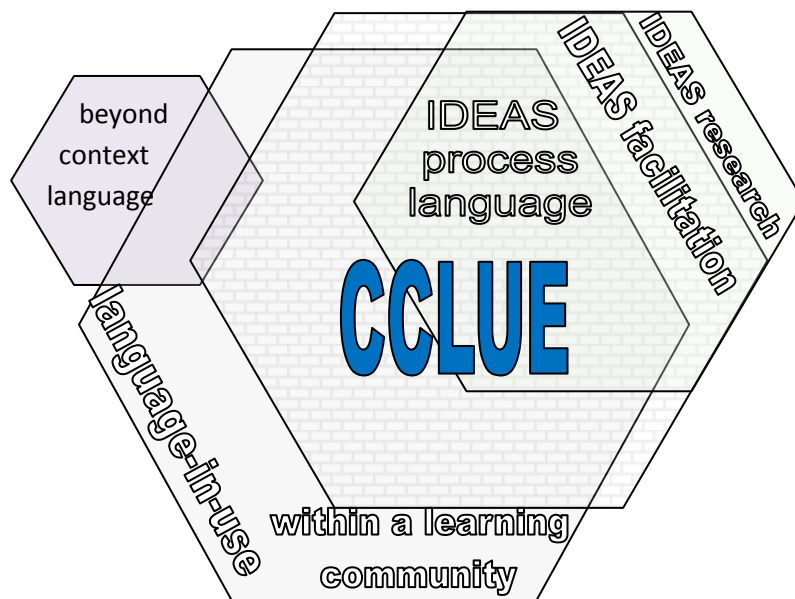
Figure 6.5 The multilayered nature of a ⟨LUE within a learning community

With the characteristics and essence of a ⟨LUE now defined, the answer to Sub-Question 2 was becoming visible. And yet, the complete depth of understanding in relation to this meaning system was tied not only to its language characteristics, but to the shared pedagogical practices of each school workplace. Thus Chapter 7 commences with an exploration of a ⟨LUE in relation to culture and pedagogy, as it is via language that understanding and engagement is translated into pedagogical action. Such practices are the practical manifestation of a school and its culture. It is these practices that impact on students and their learning therefore paving the way for school improvement to take place.

# CHAPTER 7 : INTERPRETATION INTO LIVING KNOWLEDGE

The description of a ⟨LUE indicates how the participants in this study were both co-creators and users of this meaning system. This clarified that the culturally specific pedagogical overtones of its presence are significant for all the participants within this research project. Even those research participants that were new to a school utilised each culturally specific language and added value to it and a perspective of their own. However, it had not yet been made clear how the culture of each school evolved in the way it did or in what ways staff at the school saw themselves as belonging and/or contributing to the contextually specific pedagogical practices within each site. There had been implications as to how being part of this culture had been manifested as changed pedagogical practice (for example the evolution of space into 'Place' as captured in Montage 4.3) but more detailed understandings were needed if links to sustainable school improvement were to be found.

## 7. 1 The Culture at the Time of Data Collection

At the time of data collection, some years after commencement of the IDEAS school improvement process within each school, the participants indicated that the majority of staff within their school community embraced professional learning opportunities as they saw personal learning journeys as being instrumental in providing better outcomes for students. The language-in-use within each school context had evolved into a ⟨LUE  Keeping in mind one of the limits of this study, the fact that only 3 or 4 members of each school community had been interviewed, none-the-less there were certain indicators of current culture and practice that were evident:

1.     A degree of alignment existed between espoused values, leadership structure, and pedagogical practice at both an individual and whole school level.

2.     Quality professional relationships are treasured and strengthened as they are seen as the foundation upon which to improve practice. There is an

underlying assumption that quality relationships and a no blame environment are important.

3.     A corresponding relationship exists between parallel leadership growth and the development of personal and collective professional empowerment. An espoused value that each principal professes – the desire to build capacity in others – is translated into practice with strengthening teacher leadership being evident in each context.

4.     There is a direct relationship between the acquisition or development of new knowledge creation and the individual and collective confidence to face challenges as they arise. There is an underlying assumption that change is necessary and that a staff that learns together can be confident in their ability to improve student outcomes.

5.     Mindfulness and a 'preparedness-to-listen' are actively fostered. The acknowledgement of the need for moments of silence in the data emphasises this realisation. (As the researcher I too have needed moments of silence for reflection, as indicated by the eye within the reflections box; at these moments I have taken the time to really see and feel the messages being portrayed and to position these within the context of my own lived experiences of both the phenomenon and the research process itself. These moments have also allowed me to return to the Main Question at regular intervals). The participants indicate that the espoused value of the need to really listen to and embrace multiple voices can be found within the depth of the professional conversations that take place.

6.     A collectively created rich-metaphorical vision holds a central place within each school community. Each school vision is an artefact of each community's learning journey. It is an artefact built from collective espoused values and changing perceptions about needs and future direction. Its development is both a product of building a new culture and a benchmark and a guide. Its development also reinforces values and strengthens the underlying assumptions of the reason why decisions are made and how they should be followed through.

7. Adherence to collectively created schoolwide pedagogical principles (SWP), strengthened by vision based metaphorical understandings, allows for rapid uptake and actioning of new knowledge to take place, even for those new to the school. It is at this micro-pedagogical level (Crowther & Associates, 2011) that evidence exists of the enactment of shared mental models.

8. Focussing at a micro-level on student need, according to data and anecdotal sharing, works to create pictures of future direction, thereby pointing the way for ongoing improvements to be made. The teachers and leaders within this current research project appear compelled (the moral imperative of which Sleigh (2008) speaks) to collectively work together to improve student outcomes. The focus is on the learner and this focus is reflected within a CLUE.

The changed relationship between designated leaders, teacher leaders and general staff is significant within each data-site. The language of leadership is shared, at least to some degree, and there is a sense that each participant feels a sense of 'Being' part of a learning community with a focus on deepening pedagogical practices (micro-pedagogical deepening) focussed on improving school outcomes.

## 7.2 The Pedagogical Implications of a CLUE

It is at the micro-pedagogical deepening stage (Crowther & Associates, 2011) that the pedagogical implications of a CLUE become apparent. In 'The Power of Pedagogy', Leach and Moon (2008, p. 6) explored the prerequisites that improve pedagogical practice. The connections between these prerequisites and a CLUE as it exists in these schools are placed in italics at the end of each dot point showing the correlations to the research findings:

- The mental models created by a CLUE are linked to vision, values and schoolwide pedagogical principles – *a "view of mind" related to learners and learning and the kinds of knowledge and outcomes that are valued.*

- Individual gifts and talents are acknowledged and developed – *a sense of self being the knowledge of the sort of teacher you wish to become.*

- The cognitive, relational and leadership capacities reflected in a ⟨CLUE – *knowledge is "the space in which the planned, enacted and experienced come together is at the heart of the science of pedagogy".*

- The multifaceted nature of how a ⟨CLUE makes sense of what occurs in schools and conveys meaning in a school's 'life-world' – *"Pedagogy needs to imaginatively consider the wide range of tools and technologies, both material and symbolic, that humankind has developed to make sense of and shape the world in which we live. Language, for example, is one of the most fundamental of symbolic tools and its key role in learning is widely recognised, Yet physical artefacts and technologies of all forms are also crucial to knowledge building, as they extend our knowledge and impact on the social context of our daily lives and activities."*

- Strong sense of contextually specific identity (evidenced in the KITES school, the PODS school and the BUDS school) – *"Pedagogy must build the self-esteem of the learner and create a sense of identity and empowerment."*

- The dynamism of metacognition, positivity and collective commitment embracing different opinions, critically analysing progress and a never-ending cycle of double-loop learning at play facilitated by the art of professional conversation and dialogue – *"Pedagogic settings should create the conditions for reflection and dialogue as well as productive cognitive conflict. Developing habits of mind that are questioning and critical is central to pedagogic endeavours. Therein lies the power of pedagogy to transform lives."*

The participants in this study identify strongly with 'being' part of their learning community. It is this sense of 'Being' that needs further exploration before the answer to Question 2 is formulated.

## 7.2.1 A ⟨CLUE is not a language of "Group Think"

Due to the continuing focus on returning to the main question in order to re-orient myself with the direction that the investigation was heading next, it became apparent that some could see the meaning system present within each school as being similar

in concept to a type of "group think" mentality (Lewin, 1951). With this in mind the recursive nature of this investigation again came into play and I returned to the literature so as to be able to determine the difference between the two. Lewin (1951) studied the powerful effect of group dynamics and found that, as cohesiveness within a group expands, so do feelings of positivity and empowerment that can translate into re-energised and fruitful changes in practice. However, he also found that errors of judgement can easily occur unless group thinking is objectively founded on facts and not group emotions. Janis (1972), whose studies into the problems arising from what he termed 'group think', speaks of the "repeated manifestations of the effects both – unfavourable and favourable – of the social pressures that typically develop in cohesive groups" (p. 7). Janis defines group think as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive 'ingroup', when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action" (p. 8).

Many researchers question Janis's conceptualisation of group think being linked to group cohesiveness (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Cline, 1990; Park, 1990; Schafer & Crichlow, 1996). Basically concurrence-seeking tendencies eventuate if there are undue pressures within a group to reach consensus, however, this may be more related to structure and leadership style than to group cohesiveness characteristics (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Flower, 1977).

It is group cohesiveness and parallel thinking (de Bono, 1985) that form the basis of the evolution of a CLUE. This group cohesiveness eventuates from the learning journey undertaken as a school community. It is guided by a proven process where relationships are strengthened, the gifts and talents of group members are embraced, parallel leadership capacity grows, successes are celebrated and assumptions are challenged based on data and not on group perceptions. The parallel thinking results due to the articulation of group aspirations aimed at achieving community goals. The first steps towards cohesiveness are captured as a shared vision. This shared vision is the starting point for movement towards what Crowther et al. (2011) speak of as cognitive alignment and which Jeyaraj (2011) speaks of as organisational cognisance, both of which are built on shared cognitive frames (Schein, 1992) or mental models (Senge, 1990).

The adherence to protocols of engagement and the rules of skilful discussion allow views to be aired, shared, challenged and trialled. At times impasses are reached and discussions are suspended to be returned to after further thought. These are some of the most powerful 'moments of silence' that have occurred within these schools, as when the group reconvenes the internal reflections and focussing of thinking towards student outcomes has often resulted in changed thinking and, through further discussion, a way forward is proposed. If there are still concerns about the decision made then consensus is reached to trial, evaluate and return to the group. The teachers at Forrester Hill effectively articulated this cycle of cohesive decision making. The first illustration is a quote previously used to explore a different concept and the second is from the New Teacher's perspective:

> *I think it is when we are at our most frustrated – when you think "I just cannot take any more of this – I don't agree, they're not listening" or "It's too much, it's too big I don't understand why they're asking me to do this!". I think that is when we really kind of step back and have a look at what has been asked of us, at our principles and then what we must ask of ourselves and it's then that we go – "Oh yeh! That's what needs to be done".* (Forrester Hill Teacher)

> *Mediation is not always a win-win but it's about how we can work together - understanding each other's point of view, what's the reason behind the behaviour – often times when you find the reason why behind the behaviour it's like well I can understand that and then we try to find a way forward that leaves each person feeling valued and hopefully connected to what compromise or solution is reached. It takes time – but it is worth it.* (New Teacher Forrester Hill)

It is this cohesiveness that enables an alignment of pedagogical practices across a school which is not 'group think' but a conscious commitment to a shared vision and collectively identified goals. It is the cohesive characteristics developed by the school staff, which are further evidence of how space evolved into 'Place'.

## 7.3 Pedagogical 'Being' as an Integral Component of Place

With the importance of 'Place' established, and the definitive link to cohesive pedagogical practices made, the facilitative inter-relationship between place, pedagogy and the development of a CLUE is explored in order to gain some concept of the fundamental act of what 'Being' in the 'life-world' of any one of these school communities means.

Although there may be varying degrees of each of the following, within each school the following exists:

- individual and collective commitment to the school's vision, values and pedagogical principles

- individual and collective commitment to improving outcomes for students and the community as a whole (micro-pedagogical deepening and the utilisation of gifts and talents)

- preparedness to take risks with and in front of colleagues aware the 'no blame' culture will support all those striving for improvement

- staff thinking critically and constructively becoming metacognitive analysts using data, professional conversations, skilful discussions and professional development opportunities to define and articulate best practice

- a community of users and contributors to the metaphorical meaning system that evolves through sharing deep understandings of contextually appropriate pedagogy

- a preparedness to lead as well as support the leadership of others

- acceptance  and celebration of the differences and achievements within each school community while embracing collectively developed whole school direction

- a mindful awareness of self and others with a self-confidence linked to collective identity and collegial trust

- a sense of not just being a part of the culture but 'Being' the culture itself, in an embodied form.

The following quote from the teacher returning to Sunny Fields after an 18 month absence captures well this sense of 'Being' a part of the school and its learning journey:

> *So I've come back right at the very end – when it's all happening. I can see the difference in the conversation – every conversation spins back around to what does that mean for the children and how does that relate back to the vision or the values or the pedagogy in our school. It doesn't matter what is brought up, whether it's a fax or an email or someone at the table brings up something – it is viewed through – What does that mean for our children? What does that mean for our school and our philosophy? What can I contribute?*

The change in focus was so clear when this teacher returned to the school that she felt as if this was a new school for her – one that she was not familiar with. While the new teacher at Forrester Hill captures the sense of being in this way:

> *I was aware that Forrester Hill was a big school and that people would have their niches and I didn't think there would be a place for me and that it would be hard to break into – but it wasn't like that at all…instead I feel I have already had multiple opportunities to contribute and I have only been here just less than a term. There was a real feeling of I can, I want this, I can be part of this professional group – it was great!...It seems to me that the teachers feel so empowered, and they're supported to be, and that in turn feeds down to the students…the language here is very positive – full of possibilities. The sense of commitment – what's best for everyone sets an example – it just comes through the way teachers talk and work with each other and their kids.*

While at St. Monica's the teacher leader talks of 'Being' in relation to language:

> *The language to go forward – we never had this before. It's a shared language and we are not alone in our understandings of it. So next year*

*when I go into a new grade – I can still use the language to talk with others about planning, no matter where I am.*

And the New Teacher at St. Monica's explains:

> *I really love that here – those planning sessions and professional conversations they are so good at it here. I must say that as a staff they are so dedicated. I actually moved here because I have a disabled child and I wanted to be close to home – I was foolish enough to think I would get home earlier but I am actually here till six o'clock at night with colleagues – planning, making resources – 'cos people are so dedicated and you don't mind because you are achieving what you came into teaching to do in the first place. There is no real sense of frustration that you often see in schools.*

It can be seen that this sense of 'Being' is integrally tied to the language-in-use within each school and the culture of inclusive celebratory pedagogical practice centred on student achievement thrives within the 'life-world' of each school.

## 7.3 The Cultural Presence and Utilisation of a ⟨CLUE

Once space had become 'Place', and the contextually-created language-in-use had been germinated, the growth of a ⟨LUE appeared to be rapid and strong in both purpose and influence. A complete explanation of the various components of the model follows and highlights the many interconnected factors that lead to its rapid growth as the culture itself changed. It was as if the 'the sparks of transcendence' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) had been allowed to break free of their confines in much the same way as the seed of an idea is germinated and then grows to fruition.

### 7.3.1 The 'language-in-use' seed
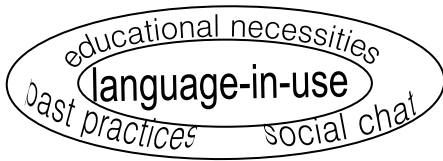


Figure 7.1 The language-in-use seed

The 'language-in-use' that was current in each school at the time they commenced the IDEAS process was the seed of what would grow into a CLUE. All schools have a language-in-use seed (as represented in Figure 7.1) that is heard daily. This language may or may not reflect the values, beliefs and 'vision' or 'mission' of a school and may or may not prove to be a meta-language of major significance when seeking school improvement. The germination of this seed and its continued growth is not connected to chance. Professional development opportunities may see the germination of this seed into the growth of something more powerful, but without the nurturing and support given by a process supported by quality parallel leadership aimed at building capacity, the power of a language to facilitate change may be stifled. This results in disillusioned teachers bemoaning the fact that leaders no longer 'walk the talk' (Forrester Hill teacher transcript as she reflected on the past).

The other two schools had no need to contend with such a negative culture, but none-the-less both benefited from a process that nurtured the seed of this powerful meaning making system allowing it to grow unhindered. It was the evolution of the meaning system through double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974) that allowed the embracing of change to occur (Appendix J).

### 7.3.2 The driving forces
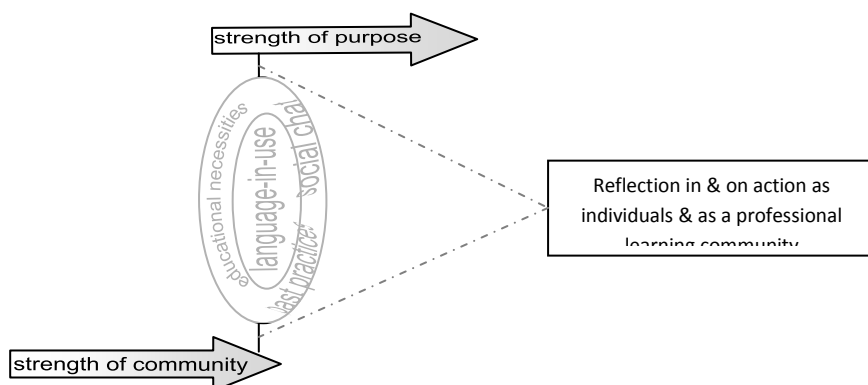


Figure 7.2 Purpose and community dynamics

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In the model the language-in-use seed separates some nurturing factors from others. All of these factors are in place in the data site schools and the reflective arrows in Figure 7.2 indicate that the ones on the left shed light on and influence what is emerging on the right. These factors are depicted in Figure 7.2 with the arrows of purpose and community only pointing in the one direction. The reason for this is that those on the left can be found in many good schools where dedicated teachers strive to improve student learning. However, a sense of community is not enough. What is needed is a sense of shared purpose (strengthened by additional catalysts) capable of triggering the type of deep meaning making that can translate into schoolwide pedagogical enhancement.

In the data site schools a CLUE was created in the presence of the other catalysts of school improvement which appear on the right-hand side of Figure 7.2 which have direct correlations to the IDEAS process itself. The validity of this observation can be found in the data of St. Monica's. At St. Monica's there was a well established sense of community and a strong sense of commitment to students and the Catholic traditions of their parish, and yet there was no real sense of a vision for the future or the presence of shared pedagogical understandings.
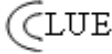
> *Initially we did not really have a shared language, even of what our values meant. We were close enough I guess – but teachers did not share their teaching practice and there was not any real sense of direction about where we should head in regards to identifying, that alone using best practice. It is so different now.* (Teacher Leader)

It is the authenticity of the current understandings and how they are an embedded characteristic of the school culture that shows the real significance that a CLUE plays in the 'life-world' of this school – not just for staff but for students as well. The following extract is from the field notes taken at St. Monica's as I sat and listened to a CLUE evidently alive in classrooms.

**St. Monica's field notes** – The language of the vision itself appears in many forms and is illustrated by students' clear understandings of what the words mean and how they relate to them personally. Images related to the knowledge behind kite making, soaring to the highest height, going where the breeze takes you, facing into the wind, and taking control abound. It is these understandings that students take with them into the world beyond school and excitedly want to share with others. It is these images that come strongly through the PowerPoint that was used within the Vision for Learning Eucharistic Liturgy that was shared with me today. However, what I found to be of most significance was the way in which the vision and meaning system rings out in classrooms..

In the student reflection session conducted by the Phase 3 students and being shared with parents, the kids use phrases such as "we use our KITES metaphors to help us understand our KITES values better"; "I…soared with my learning when I did my first spelling test…and I got 10 out of 10"; "I was surprised by where the breeze took me…when I learnt my times table by playing a game"; "a time when I had to face into the wind was when I had a go at spelling a really hard word and I got it right".

It is the sense of having a clear direction as both a community and as a teaching staff that drives pedagogy within the school. The same drive and dynamic evolution of being one with the culture of the school can be found in each school with St. Monica's being but an example. So for these schools what were the nurturing factors that worked together to create the culture from which a (CLUE evolved?

### 7.3.3 The nurturing factors of a (CLUE

Within the schools involved in this research a number of nurturing factors can be identified. These factors all relate in some way to the unfolding of the process itself and are largely sequential in nature:

- initial engagement with the process itself;

- the IDEAS protocols of engagement become established;

- the school community articulates shared values and beliefs;

- examination of Diagnostic Inventory data highlights contextually specific successes and areas requiring action;

- the 'no blame environment' sees the development of relational trust;

- sharing of needs and aspirations linked to context coalesces into the development of a 'vision' to guide the way forward;

- teachers share quality practice and professional conversations develop new understandings;

- the critical mass of school community members are committed to seeing improved outcomes come into being;

- a framework of action and reflection based on a set of collectively developed schoolwide pedagogical principles is developed; and

- the translating of the framework into classroom micro-pedagogical action.

As these elements of language and culture continued to grow and become embedded in the fabric of school life, a (CLUE) emerged as a powerful force that was facilitated by and facilitated further positive change.

## 7.3.4 The process as a nurturer
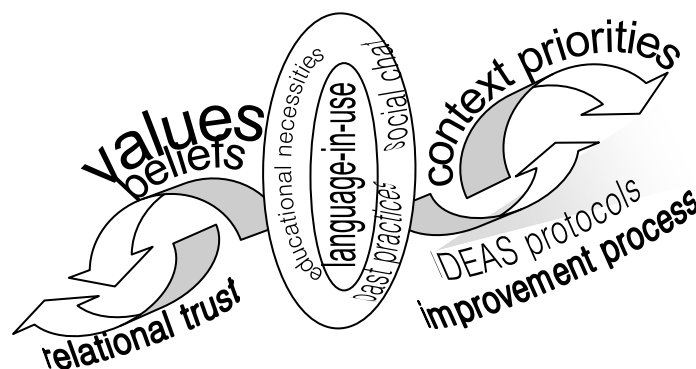


Figure 7.3 The unfolding development within the school improvement process

The development which occurred within relationships, and the means in which the prioritising of practices unfolded, as illustrated in Figure 7.3, appeared to be due largely to the school improvement process undertaken. Involvement in this process (the IDEAS process) was one shared by all schools and was externally supported by the education systems involved and by the university based external IDEAS facilitators.

- IDEAS protocols of engagement were established. Each school had different issues to overcome in order to achieve this; for example, St. Monica's found this goal less problematic to achieve than Forrester Hill as theirs was a close community and congenial relationships were already in place, whereas the Forrester Hill community had become fractured over a two-year period of leadership uncertainty.

- The protocols of engagement had to be reinforced by school leaders in order for the 'no blame' environment to be firmly established. All respondents made comment as to the importance of this pre-requisite being clearly developed and maintained, as it was from this point that participants felt safe to freely express their values, beliefs and aspirations and relational trust grew.

- All schools used the Diagnostic Inventory data and Research-Based Framework to highlight contextually specific challenges categorised into context priorities; and therefore, identify the key issues and goals that would be set for their school. These became a focus point for 'dreaming' and the creation of a metaphorical vision to lead the school into the future. On-going data exploration in all contexts led to deep, focussed conversations, as the journey of self-discovery unfolded.

## 7.3.5 Parallel leadership as a catalyst

The central core of the model has not been verbally articulated within Figure 7.1 but the linear nature and the line of continuance from which each phase unfurls is indicative of the inner core of parallel leadership. Initially this form of distributed leadership is between the principal and the IDEAS school management team but as the dynamics of the process take effect, a variety of school community members take on leadership roles as needs arise and commitment grows and leadership capacity expands.

Drawing on the COSMIC capacity building model (Crowther & Associates, 2011), depicted in Figure 1.2, parallel leadership is the driving force linking one dynamic to the next. The research from where the model evolved was conducted in a number of

Victorian State Schools and the emphasis placed on the development of parallel leadership resonates with the data from these three schools with participants indicating that:

> *It actually got to the point where it was not the IDEAS team driving the research as other people started to bring in things to share. It was really good and I think that is why it has been able to be embedded so well in everything we do.* (St. Monica's Principal)

> *Accessing knowledge and moving that knowledge around – valuing the contribution of others in your team – everyone has something to add and each of us leads the conversation at times.* (St. Monica's New Teacher)

> *Developing leadership in others – allowing others to lead – I really look for those opportunities and relish it when teachers such as J…. come forward and volunteer to trial something new.* (Forrester Hill Principal)

> *(P) gives you plenty of opportunities… sometimes you have to go and hide so she doesn't give you anymore (laughter). Opportunities are there but it's like with the kids…you've got to accept them. We are well supported to have a go at things. I guess the way I see it is that (P) sees herself as a team player…She has a team around her who she strongly encourages to be actively involved in decision making and direction in all areas of the school.* (Forrester Hill Teacher)

> *Parallel leadership provides strength in times of change – even our teacher aide knows how to run the school.* (Sunny Fields Principal)

> *As a team we are always reflecting, changing, evaluating and reflecting again. Things are different than they used to be – more focussed – we question and contribute more now*. (Sunny Fields New Teacher)

This sense of being contributors to the learning community as gifts and talents are shared, with each person contributing to the whole, both empowers staff and encourages ongoing commitment to improving practice.

## 7.3.6 Developing strength of community
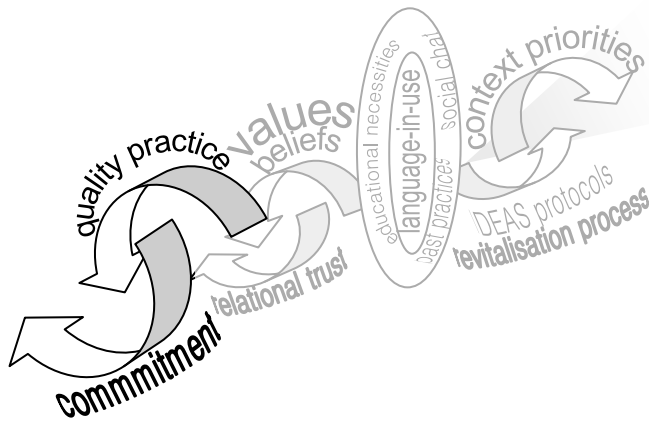


Figure 7.4 Community commitment

It is important to note that within the two additional loops of Figure 7.4, the ones leading to the development of a strong sense of community, the inner core of parallel leadership is absent. Commitment, at an individual and at a collective level, is closely linked to the development of professional expertise within schools. Practice must be examined and critiqued at a personal level before it can be shared and built upon if professional capacity is to grow. Quality professional practice exists in schools but the concern for many years has been that these pockets of quality practice may exist in one classroom here and another one there, but that the breaking of down of barriers to schoolwide quality practice has still to be achieved in many educational contexts (Cuttance, 2001; Fullan, 2006a; Hargreaves, 2003a; Hattie, 2003; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). In these IDEAS schools, the emphasis on professional learning as the key to professional revitalisation and the celebration of teachers as the key has produced pride and a willingness to take risks. This allows for viewing and critiquing of practice; identifying past practices that work and initiatives that may have potential; and identifying where needs might be addressed by accessing additional professional development opportunities.

Once again, excerpts from the transcripts illustrate this commitment to the development of the learning community as evidenced in these three schools. This excerpt is taken from a discussion between Sunny Fields staff:

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Principal: *High expectations underpin everything because we know we need to raise our expectations if the children are to reach a better standard than what they're doing currently.*

New teacher: *We were evaluating reading books the other afternoon and because all of us had done the literacy workshop…we went to an Ashton's Scholastic show thing and we were all looking for reading schemes…*

Principal: *All four of us. It was Thursday and we all went up and …*

Teacher leader: *But there was not a single book that appealed to us because now we've got so focussed on what we're looking for in a book, the quality of the language, the structure of the genre … the functional grammar – we are very discerning!*

## 7.3.7 Pedagogy strengthened by a metaphorical vision
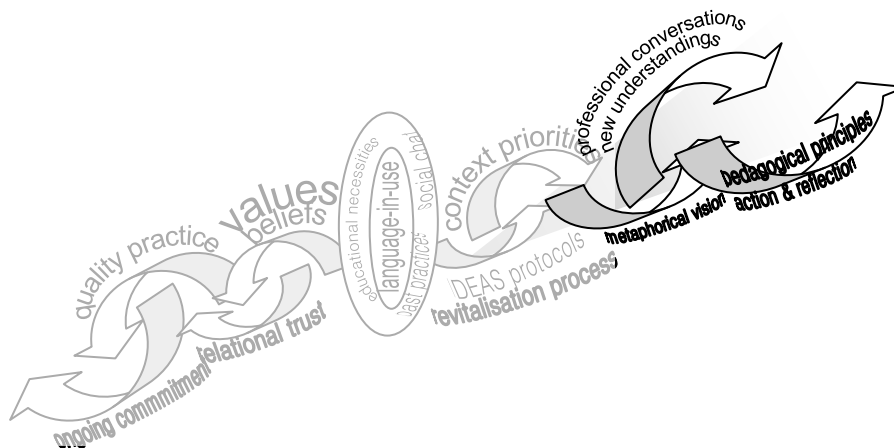


Figure 7.5 The importance of Vision and SWP

What evolved within these schools was a focus on pedagogy that had not previously been evident. Figure 7.5 illustrates that this occurred as a direct result of the development of a metaphorical vision for a desired future. This vision emerged in partnership with the professional conversations that fore-fronted the focus onto developing shared understandings related to pedagogical principles, actions and reflections on pedagogy. The significance of the metaphorical nature of the visions in helping staff, and in particular teaching staff, make these pedagogical connections will now be explored.

'Mental stereo imaging' has been used throughout this thesis to indicate the complex nature of cognition when we think of one concept in terms of another. A predominant sub-set within what is termed as 'mental stereo imaging' (the type of communicative representations that convey dual meanings such as metaphor, simile, symbolism, analogies and the like) is related to the use and power of metaphor. Of particular interest in this research has been the organisational metaphors used in conjunction with school vision statements. Each rich-metaphorical vision collectively created by its whole school community provided a strong sense of purpose and direction for these participants. The metaphors linked to a CLUE have helped to make the shared mental models clearer and more accessible to the participants within this investigation. To a degree, the metaphors have contributed to the development of deeper pedagogical understandings and have played a significant role in the rapid uptake of knowledge by the new teachers within each context.

This finding resonates well with what organisational culture researchers and linguist scholars have said in relation to organisational metaphor, in particular, and metaphor in general (Kövecses, 2005; Lakoff & Johnston, 1980; Steen, 2004, 2008). It is possible that the 'mental stereo imaging' related to the use of rich-metaphors, strengthens and creates the sense of dynamic interaction within the shared mental models evident within these schools. They assist in the formation of what Lakomski (2001, p. 72) calls a "cognitive culture". It is Lakomski's exploration of how groups come by cultural assumptions, mental models or 'theories-in-use' (in whatever manner they are named), that open the way to this concept of cognitive culture. She identifies that "culture is not a separate realm above the everyday routines, understandings, and interactions with others, with materials, or artifacts, it is a cognitive process" (p. 73). Lakomski goes on to explore how brain research has shown that neuronal connections that are repeatedly activated are strengthened and "the fundamental insight that the human brain is a very powerful neuronal pattern recognition engine allows us to recognise all aspects of human cognition, the inner, non-symbolic, as well as the outer, symbolic manifestations as continuous" (p. 74). By fostering particular patterns it is possible to influence the cognitive culture towards one direction or another. The findings from this current research indicate that patterns reinforced by rich-metaphors possess a complexity and depth of understandings that contribute to the sustainability of a strong cognitive culture.

Speaking from a cognitive linguistic perspective, Kövecses (2005) sees primary metaphors, when placed together in contextually specific languages and cultures, as forming 'complex' metaphors. Primary metaphors are those that many individuals from a variety of backgrounds would interpret in similar ways, however, complex metaphors, or what I have chosen to call rich-metaphors, are not universal by nature and are instead peculiar to their context and their community (Kövecses, 2005, p. 4). Kövecses goes on to say that many "metaphors are based on cultural considerations and cognitive processes of various kinds" (p. 4). Feldman (2006), building on the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), proposed the neural theory of language (NTL) which sees the neural basis of language and thought as being a process where information processing metaphors, like vision metaphors, become powerful tools for "understanding physical systems, particularly now that there are well-developed theories within computer science of how information is processed" (p. 21).

Feldman's work appears to bring the fields of neural activity, metaphor usage, culture and language together. "There is always a rich interaction between culture, conceptual systems, and the language used to talk about them" (Feldman, 2006, p. 194) which complements what has been well documented in relation to culture, language and attitude (Bourdieu, 1998; Geertz,1973) and also in the field of organisational culture and organisational metaphor (Lakoff & Johnston, 1980; Morgan, 1980). There are links between the broad anthropological view of education as being knowledge construction and cultural transmission (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996; Pelissier, 1991), and a neural activity view that sees stronger neuron pathways being made by the synapses between the stereo fields encompassed within cultural and organisational metaphor.

When considering this neural approach to metaphor I felt a real need to understand, at a basic level, what recent brain research was saying about processes of cognition. As in the case of the space into 'Place' filter I had not required this knowledge when the literature review was being conducted. In many ways, knowledge about how the brain works was incidental to the study and therefore could be seen as not important. However, what I learnt about brain functioning added weight to the value of using metaphor to create connections within school contexts.

The human brain has been found to be a system of neurons intricately linked together and working via electrochemistry – with thought being structured neural activity and language being inextricable from thought and experience (Goldblum, 2001). Connections between neurons change as different messages are sent through the neuron networks, this moment of connection is one of conversion or 'synapses' and the changes that occur in the synapses take place due to a principle called Hebb's Rule (Goldblum, 2001). This means that as a neuron fires in response to another neuron, the synapses between the two is strengthened. Therefore

> almost all learning in the brain occurs through the strengthening or weakening of the existing links…Each time one neuron provides part of the input needed for another neuron to fire, the synapses between the two is strengthened just a little bit. As a result, the second neuron is just that little bit more likely to fire the next time it receives an input from the first one, thus strengthening the synapses a little more. If this process is repeated over and over again, it results in very strong links between particular neurons (Goldblum, 2001, p. 29).

If considered in conjunction with the stereo quality of metaphor then this may explain the manner in which metaphorical imagery, verbal, visual or structural, can trigger the rapid uptake of pedagogical meaning. If the imagery is continually linked to types of pedagogical practices and ways of working, then over time, and with repeated associations, the neuron links that fire when bridging the gap between image and action become stronger, and the constructed meaning system that incorporates both, becomes a powerful conduit for carrying the construction of new understandings through into action. According to Goldblum (2001) the areas of the brain that process information acquired from our senses are similar to those where actions are formed, and those where thinking and reasoning take place. "We therefore, ought to look for a theory about the mind's operation that works for perception and action as well as for associations and reasoning" (p. 48).

Permanent memories are stored in networks of the brain called the cortex, while temporary memories are stored internally in the hippocampus. A temporary memory will last only a short time however, as events occur that reinforce this memory over a period of time, it will progress to the cortex (Goldblum, 2001, p. 91). Therefore, it seems logical to presume that metaphors, in particular ones that are seen or heard every day, act as triggers that can assist temporary connections to become permanent ones. Therefore, jingles, catch cries, word metaphors, symbols or even snippets of music (the ones that you cannot get out of your head), used frequently enough, create cognitive short cuts to individual and collective understanding.

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From a neural perspective, primary metaphors can be seen as a normal consequence of associative learning because one of the central facts researchers know about the brain is that "neurons that fire together, wire together" (Feldman, 2006, p. 201). This research demonstrates that educational communities with conceptual understandings of best practice and mental models related to framework of pedagogical principles, which are clearly linked to a metaphorical vision (such as flying a kite), bring together episodes of understanding that cause neurons to fire together and therefore, become coactive.

The neural theory of language suggests that "abstract meanings are understood by mapping them metaphorically to concrete image and action schemas" (Feldman, 2006, p. 177) with thought being structured neural activity and language being inextricable from thought and experience. This complements Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work which highlighted the way in which we see our world through metaphorical mental constructs which are shaped by our world and which shape our reality, as well as that of Saban (2006) who states:

> Every metaphor assumes or generates a lexicon, a vocabulary, a way of naming within the conceptual framework of the metaphor, which embodies and reflects certain underlying values, and which has the potential, if taken as totalizing, to eclipse other ways of thinking and behaving. (p. 300)

Such knowledge must certainly be taken into account when selecting a metaphor to aid thinking and the acquisition of knowledge in school settings. By choosing rich-metaphors that are multi-layered and generative by nature and in conjunction with connected forms of imageries, the danger of locking thinking into restrictive frames can be largely avoided and instead the benefits of tapping into new ways of seeing through metaphorical associations can be reaped. My current research findings confirm what Gillis and Johnson (2002) argue, that "metaphor can help us understand the selves we want to become" (p. 38).

Properly used, metaphors and analogies can provide a type of shorthand to help define the intangible or abstract. Although Schmidt, Kranjec, Cardillo and Chatterjee (2009) effectively demonstrate that those working to understand how metaphor makes meaning are still divided as to which areas of the brain react to metaphor and why, there is general consensus that metaphor does have a significant impact on the way in which we process information both at an affective and a cognitive level.

## 7.3.8 The place of rich-metaphor within the data site schools

Within each of the schools the metaphorical character of each of the visions has impacted on the ways of working and making meaning within the school. Each of the metaphors, though distinctly different in appearance and wording, possesses three common and powerful traits:

<u>Firstly</u> each is a rich-metaphor – by this I mean that it is non-restrictive in nature. If organisational metaphors can imprison or set free (Morgan, 1980) then a rich-metaphor is the 'set free' type, as it allows layers of meaning to be generated and it is not confined to a static understanding of meaning. It can be added to at will and its resonance can be used creatively in many contexts.

At Sunny Fields the school's vision – 'Growing beautiful futures in a valley of opportunities' – is enriched by metaphors of growth linked to images of buds and sunflowers. The linking of the word growing to the pedagogical framework of SMARTS (growing smarter each day) connects to the metaphorical concept of cognitive growth.

At Forrester Hill the school's vision – 'Growing together learning forever' – is linked to the imagery of a Jacaranda tree which is rich with metaphors of growth, roots, trunks, flowers, pods, nurturing and the like – all of which are indicative of a focus on relationships (how each supports the other) and developmental growth in all areas.

At St. Monica's the school's vision – 'From this hill we will soar' – is in itself a metaphor for challenge and success. Richness is added by the image of a kite which is indicative of freedom and individualism, as well as the image of a child with its multiplicity of meanings. All these metaphorical elements relate to the striving for new heights in relation to school/student outcomes.

Secondly each has significance to the school community as the metaphor is related to past, present, future aspirations and geographical indicators, thus bridging time and space:

At Sunny Fields the image of the bottle tree is taken from the presence of a number of these distinctly shaped trees within the grounds. The school is situated in one of the most fertile agricultural valleys in Queensland and the majority of parents either possess a hobby farm or live off the land, so the growth cycle is a part of everyday life in this community. The images of the linked figures is an image taken from the past school emblem.

At Forrester Hill the words 'Growing Together' came from a past social skills program that both students and parents had seen as being valuable. The Jacaranda tree already adorned student uniforms and parents insisted that this image would remain. The school grounds are beautified by many Jacaranda trees that shed purple carpets of magnificence at various times of the year and are seen as being an outstanding feature of the school by staff, parents and students alike.

At St. Monica's the school is positioned on a hill and elements of the drawing relate to significant features of the school and its past. The Mercy Cross that adorns the kite is the link to its spiritual heritage; the leaves on the kite's tail are representative of the old much loved tree on its grounds; and the child is neither boy nor girl but an image of childhood itself.

<u>Finally</u>, each mean something to the student population of the school and students appear to identify the image with their school and their sense of who they are within that school community. From the field notes from each school the following extracts illustrate the importance of the Vision metaphor to the students, as do the images taken from the montages:

At Sunny Fields there is a conscious emphasis placed on holding heads up high in the community and displaying the school values for all to see. Students celebrate their BUDS values and they form an integral part of their learning journal reflections. This is illustrated by an extract from one student's learning journal – *I really tried to <u>be responsible</u> today when I was working with N... I tried to set a good example by not being distracted when the mower was making such a noise outside.* The first BUDS value is 'Be honest and responsible'.
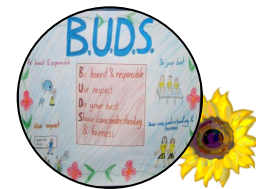
At Forrester Hill students talked of decorating the school Christmas Tree for the shopping centre with silver and gold Jacaranda pods because 'that is what people see – they're the special things we do – our behaviour and successes'.
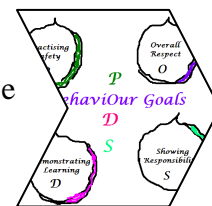
At St. Monica's P..... was sharing his excitement about one of his birthday presents – a game for his computer. He talked of not having the 'knowledge' in the beginning (the first point within the SWP), and finding it really hard to understand. He likened this to having to "climb the hill" – but when he got the hang of the game he said proudly 'my kite soared'.

These illustrations of rich-metaphorical visions, brought to life within school communities, highlight the strong sense of identity that such a metaphor can create

and the significance that a shared meaning system, interwoven with a metaphorically rich vision, plays in the lives of its community members. The relational and cognitive links created, combined with other factors within the model, build a foundation or shared 'Place' of understanding and engagement for those who cohabit within the school space.

Another major facilitative factor of a CLUE development is the ongoing professional conversations that occur. Via these conversations staff tackle difficult issues and support the learning of others. Another key factor is the development of a framework of pedagogical principles called the schoolwide pedagogy. Once created, this framework guides thinking and decision making within the school. It is these strands that entwine together and make the culture stronger in much the same way as the strands of a rope enable it to withstand great force – forces far greater than any series of single strands could handle.

> *From Prep to Yr 7 we are using the same terminology and that consistency really makes a difference for our students. It's all related to our vision and SWP and the PODS sheet – these things have the same meaning for all of us. Our values, for example, respect, responsibility, individual dignity and worth, the kids know these so well…*

> *I guess it's a shared understanding of who we are, what our kids needs are and where we have come from... The conversations we have now are really centred on learning and we talk and plan together across the school. We want to improve we want to make it the best possible place it can be for the kids, so everybody feels safe and everybody is learning. We want to help every child to have understanding so that they don't feel confused moving from one room to another from the classroom the playground, so they feel confident and we hope parents are using the same language to support their students.*

> *I just remember when we had staff meetings or Pupil Free Days we used to chat around issues and not really get anywhere – we didn't seem to know how to get somewhere. We did not talk at a deep level about anything but now we look at research we look at what different people*

*have written and what different schools have done, even in the UK and other countries, we have had a good look at things that matter to our context.* (Forrester Hill Teacher)

The rich-metaphors used within the data sites can be clearly linked back to what the literature referred to as the power of metaphor. In *Understanding Organization through Language,* Tietze (2003) clearly defines the positives and negatives of organisational metaphors. She sees the negatives of a metaphorical mindset as being that certain features may be hidden while others become accentuated, therefore, a type of brain-washing occurs and a false consciousness eventuates that hinders critical thinking within the organisation and "alienates new ideas and the people who have them" (p. 47). Indicators of these negatives being at play within schools had been mentioned by the New Teacher at Forrester Hill which was the one school where this fear had been clearly articulated.

> *I was instantly aware that Forrester Hill was a big school and that people had their niches and ways of working - I didn't think there would be a place for me and that it would be hard to break into that but it wasn't like that at all… This is leadership - we ask it of each other. All this just happens it is not a pointed or contrived thing it just happens and it comes through all over the place. I feel I have already had multiple opportunities to contribute and I have only been here for a term.*

In another section of her transcript the New Teacher at Forrester Hill expands on the power of the metaphor in the following manner:

> *The overarching thing is… the way things are tied together with the tree, the vision etc they create meaning…The understanding of relationships happens inside self and out, the understanding of concepts and how to teach well – that's inside and out… I don't have to sacrifice any of what and who am I, instead I can add value to these and know I can add value.*

Keeping in mind the Forrester Hill schoolwide pedagogy of *Growing Together, Learning Forever, Supporting Each Other,* tying pedagogical practice to the image and metaphor of the Jacaranda tree has connected this new staff member to this school and its culture in an empowering manner.

Thus 'mental stereo imaging', or the metaphorical process, forges a number of connections: the tying together of cultural threads with cognitive ones; an underlying acceptance of a rich-metaphor being indicative of growth, aspirations and potential; the empowerment of being able to add value; and, the opening up of new ways of thinking and acting which enhance individual and collective practice – the sense of being leaders of learning as well as participants in the learning process.

Each one of these points resonates with the findings of Tietze (2003) and others (Lakoff & Johnston, 1980; Morgan, 1980) who highlight the contribution that metaphor can play in organisational understandings. Tietze (2003, p. 47) articulates these positives as being that metaphor is generative; allowing members to view things from new perspectives, creating new knowledge as learnings are combined with metaphorical perspectives, allowing access to organisational meaning systems; and, providing an anchor in emotional realities and shared values systems.

The resonance that comes from the pedagogical and metaphorical visions and frameworks for practice within these IDEAS schools is, therefore, capable of connecting communities across time and space (Giddens, 1976) as school personnel change. They contribute to the layered understandings of pedagogy and relationships within each school which harks back to Ricouer's (1973) and Carr's (2006) understandings of how the meanings within metaphor are transmitted in stereo. Morgan (1997) too states that when we "use metaphor…we attempt to understand one element of an experience in terms of another" (p. xx).

Cameron's (2003) concept of metaphorical *alterity* reflects one of Tietske's points about the creation of new knowledge through metaphor use. *Alterity* is the ability that metaphor has to alter thinking and acting which, in relation to the language construct under interrogation, reinforces the understanding and engagement components of the contextually created language-in-use within each school. Lakoff and Johnston (1980) articulate a similar perspective

> In all aspects of life...we define our reality in terms of metaphors and
> then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors. We draw inferences,
> set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how

we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by
means of metaphor. (p. 158)

Cameron's (2003) additional insight into the 'intimacy' created by shared
understandings can also be seen in the way each community identifies in a profound
way to being part of a 'KITES' community, or a 'Jacaranda PODS' community, or a
'BUDS' community.
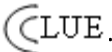
Steen's (2008) knowledge regarding three levels of metaphorical meaning give
insights to these findings. The new staff who participated in this research commented
on how the vision metaphor helped them to 'bridge' understandings (the naming
level); as well as conceptualise the pedagogical direction being taken within each site
(the framing level); and collective understandings were aired and new interpretations
of direction emerged (the changing level) while still being clearly linked to the same
old vision. Finally, the ability of each community to act on its convictions and have
the passion to keep striving for improvement is a direct link to Goddard's (2004)
understanding of 'active' metaphor which is enhanced by the power of mental stereo
imagery to allow thinking to go 'beyond laterality' (Schmidt, Kranjec, Cardillo, &
Chatterjee, 2009) into creative and unexplored landscapes.

## 7.3.9 The zone of resonance

Within the model (Figure 6.2) the dotted lines placed at random I have called the
*zone of resonance*. This terminology is linked to Drucker's (1946) understanding of
an organisation being like a tune that "is not constituted by individual sounds but by
the relations between them" (p. 26). School personnel living and working in the *zone
of resonance* are more likely to accept the value of multi-channel inputs and be
prepared to traverse unchartered terrains in the quest for personal, professional and
collective improvement. However, on the left side of the seed this will still not be
brought to fruition without the accompanying triggers being activated on the other
side of the 'language-in-use' praxis. The resonances of all these nurturing factors
contribute to what a (CLUE sounds like, looks like and feels like within the school
context in which it grows to fruition. It is the character of these resonances that has
contributed to the wording of the acronym of a (CLUE which is used to represent
the meaning systems created within these schools.

This resonance is largely due to the multifaceted 'voices' harmonising into the essence of 'Being' part of the specific community present in the data sites. "It seems to me that knowledge and the communication with others which it presupposes not only are original formations with respect to the perceptual life but also they preserve and continue our perceptual life even while transforming it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 7). A key factor within the establishment of this *zone of resonance* is the rich-metaphor that exists within each of these schools as each rich-metaphor has the following attributes:

- reinforced by other forms of stereo mental imaging such as similes and analogies which are still linked to the overall imagery

- acts as an entry point to cultural and organisational understandings

- connects the community across time, space and changes in staffing structure

- facilitates the building of school wide relationships and understandings

- facilitates the creation of new knowledge and understanding

- values and adds value through its power to integrate and embrace while still allowing the space for critical reflection to occur

- when juxtaposed against information coming in, metaphor triggers a positive cognitive response linking the new to a familiar framework of understanding

- encourages non-lateral thinking and acting by stimulating creative responses to new knowledge

- strengthens mental models by using recognised and accepted ways of responding and acting, triggered by their connection to the micro-component of the rich-metaphor in question, thus also reinforcing 'cognitive culture' (Lakomski, 2001).

All of which indicate that the resonance from rich-metaphor plays a strong role in sustaining culture, practice and energy within a school community, and how it is in fact central to the meaning system which is a ⊂LUE.

# 7.4 The Meaning of the Words that Form the Acronym

The decision of which words to use in order to describe the 'language-in-use' within these data sites evolved over time. One example of the process of 'naming' is that until quite late in the data exploration process I had continually used the words 'contextually-constructed'. However, it became obvious that there was never a conscious decision made by school participants or school communities in general to 'construct' what became a CLUE Instead there was an organic aspect to both the growth of culture and the growth of a CLUE The one seemed to generate the creation of the other and visa versa. Therefore, the whole concept of 'created' captured far more eloquently this complex sense of evolution and the realisation that something unique had been brought into 'being' for those with the lived experience of a CLUE.

Therefore, an explanation supported by the Oxford Dictionary (1996) definitions, as to the final meaning of the carefully chosen word components of the CLUE acronym, gives insights into the significance of a CLUE within these communities and for the participants in this research:

- **Contextually-created** indicates that each language-in-use is sculpted from the culture it represents and each of these will be different. Although ostensibly each school underwent the same revitalisation process and certain elements of IDEAS process language are embedded in each reiteration of a CLUE, they are none-the-less fundamentally different. This difference is due to the context in which each was created. The dictionary definitions of context as 'the circumstances or facts that surround a particular situation, event, etc.' and create as 'to bring into being; cause to exist; invest with new character or function; give rise to' capture the meaning that evolved from the data.

- **Language** possesses many meanings to many people and this diversity of meaning is well expressed by the dictionary definitions of 'communication by voice in the distinctly human manner, using arbitrary auditory symbols in conventional ways with conventional meanings; any set or system of such symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people,

who are thus enabled to communicate intelligibly with one another; any basis of communication and understanding'. In the defining of a ⟨CLUE⟩ the word language is used to mean 'the language-in-use' within a school context that entails any basis of communication and co-creation of meaning between members of that community. This may be in the form of words, images, actions or physical constructs of time and space. Therefore, this language is referring to a meaning making system unique to each context and daily utilised as a living breathing representation of cultural entity.

- **Understanding** is essential in order for the sharing of ideas and best practice to occur. It is the basic foundation upon which a learning environment is built. The dictionary definition of 'understand' highlights a number of key aspects of what individual and collective understanding means in these schools (the dictionary definition of understanding is the act of one who understands; a mutual comprehension of each other's meanings, thoughts etc.). When placed together these capture the essence of what is actioned when one 'understands'. They are as follows: to perceive the meaning of; grasp the idea; be thoroughly familiar with; to comprehend by knowing the meaning of the words used, as a language; to interpret, or assign a meaning; to grasp the significance, implications, or importance of; and to conceive the meaning of in a particular way. Each of these definitions alone does not capture the essence of understanding as it is portrayed by the data. However, together they paint a complex picture of deep understanding that allows alignment of practice and collective commitment to reflection and change to occur.

- **Engagement** is the noun derived from the word engage. Once again the dictionary definitions of engage, when combined, highlight the essence of what engagement means to the personnel within these schools. Engage is to occupy the attention or efforts of (a person, etc); to attract and hold fast; to bind as by pledge, promise, contract, or oath; to interlock with; to occupy oneself; become involved; to pledge one's word; assume an obligation. The data demonstrates how these school community members have committed themselves to the quest for ongoing school improvement and how this

commitment develops parallel leadership as teams strive for goals that have been collectively set. There is evidence that the vision itself acts in some ways as an oath or a sign of the pledge towards personal and collective capacity building to aid the school improvement endeavour. Not all members of a school may commit their efforts in the same manner but none-the-less if the majority express a real sense of being committed to the journey then school improvement can occur.

# 7.5 The Answer to Research Sub-Question 2
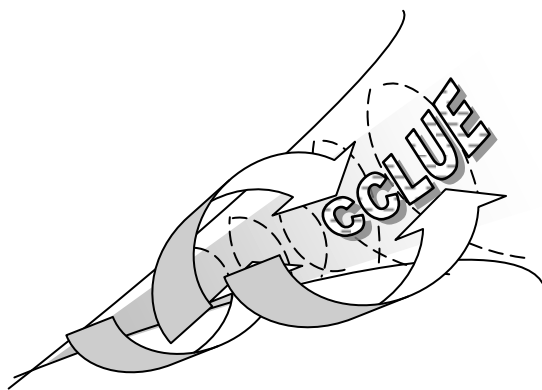


Figure 7.6 The utilisation of a CCLUE

**The answer to Research Sub-Question 2: Of what significance is the presence and utilisation of this language-in-use within the 'life-world' of the educators at these schools?**

A CCLUE (as depicted in Figure 7.6) is a meaning system which evolves out of school community's united desire for school improvement. This desire, when translated into action guided by a quality framework (such as the IDEAS process), enables the development of a generative way of working as a school community which embraces the need for on-going change. It is a meaning system utilised by educators, both individually and together, leaders and teachers, to make rapid cognitive and relational connections which strengthen and deepen identity, understandings, pedagogy, justifications of pedagogy, and integrity of intent. It leads to growth of purpose, collective commitment and changes in pedagogical practice.

By nature a (CLUE is pedagogical, metaphorical, inspirational and organic. Its ever evolving nature is indicative of its presence and contribution to the 'life-world' of educators. It is a language of leadership and learning. It is not a static language-construct locking people into a particular mindset but is instead a generative mental model being constantly updated with new knowledge – in much the same way as a Global Positioning System (GPS) must be reconfigured regularly to update its maps, thereby allowing it to head in the right direction. At the heart of both a (CLUE and its culture lies a focus on student current and future needs, with the shared meaning system allowing educators to embrace change, in partnership with their colleagues, as a means of moving closer to shared goals.

The nature of the meaning system is captured by these insights into its use:

- Educators may use a (CLUE as a conduit for sharing understandings of how to improve teaching and learning.

  *I guess it's a shared understanding of who we are, what our kids needs are and where we have come from. The conversations we have now are really centred on learning and we talk and plan together across the school. We want to improve, we want to make it the best possible place it can be for the kids, so everybody feels safe and everybody is learning. We want to help every child to have understanding so that they don't feel confused moving from one room to another, from the classroom the playground.* (Forrester Hill Teacher)

- The rich-metaphors embedded within a (CLUE help to unify a community and are capable of having powerful significance for students.

  *The other night we had our disco… a parent pulled me aside and said "Oh, I just wanted to let you know that I went with D... to his year five interview for his year seven entry into high school. One of the teachers there who was interviewing the prospective students asked him where he went to school. He said "Oh I go to St. Monica's" and she said "Oh I've heard such lovely things about that school". I thought it was just a passing comment… but then she started to talk to him about school and what he was doing at school and all that sort of thing and she said "Oh that is where the KITES is happening, isn't it? And D...said "oh yes" and I asked*

*the interviewer "How did you know about the KITES?" and she said*
*"because the children who are coming in for the interviews have been*
*talking to us about KITES".* (St. Monica's Principal)

- The protocols that guide the process as it unfolds also guide the development of the meaning system and remain central to its structure strengthening both the cognitive and relational connections across each community.

   *The overarching thing is that it is the whole place, the way things are tied*
   *together with the tree, the vision etc they create meaning. The*
   *conversations that occur seem to happen anywhere. The understanding of*
   *relationships happens inside self and out, the understanding of concepts*
   *and how to teach well – that's inside and out. There is no one place!*
   (Forrester Hill New Teacher)

- It facilitates new knowledge creation and as new knowledge is made explicit this in turn facilitates changes in the 'language-in-use', in an organic symbiotic relationship between the two.

   *It's also a really important reminder to ourselves – as you know how*
   *you'll find some great practice that works and then over time it kind of*
   *fades out of the picture – well we did not want this to happen*
   *unintentionally. Fair enough if the pedagogy changes because of the*
   *students needs but that is intentional not forgetfulness driven change.* (St.
   Monica's Teacher Leader)

   *Since we wrote our SWP we already need to deliberately change it as –*
   *since then we have done our literacy training and that has given us new*
   *knowledge and greater insights into the best way to teach certain aspects*
   *of the essentials and how to look at texts both verbal and visual.* (Sunny
   Fields Principal)

Thus the significance of a ⊂LUE to the educators within these data sites is that it assists in the continual merging and re-merging of new and old community members, new and old pedagogies, new and old values and beliefs, new and old plans of understanding and new and old frames of action. These spiralling

avenues of thinking and acting are dependent on the levels of depth present in the professional conversations that occur within the professional learning community and on the parallel leadership structures in place as teachers share their gifts and strengths safe in the knowledge that their input is valued. The depth and layered nature of this meaning system lies at the heart of these school communities and is evidence of micro-pedagogical deepening at work: the pedagogical approach to school improvement both facilitates and is facilitated by the language-in-use. Berger and Luckmann (1966) capture the importance of language within our experiencing of the world as:

> Everyday life, is above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life. Language has its origins in the face-to-face situation, but can be readily detached from it…language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations. (p. 37)

If within this graphic depiction by Berger and Luckmann the word language is replaced with the concept of a (CLUE then it captures the role this contextually specific meaning system plays in the 'life-world' of the personnel within these school communities.

# CHAPTER 8 : THE ANSWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

Phase 4 sees this investigation come to fruition as the essence and implications of the phenomenon have now been captured in verbal and visual imagery. The 'Essence' of a (CLUE is culture. A (CLUE is a cultural meaning system that is pedagogical, metaphorical, inspirational and organic. It is the 'Place' where understanding is generated and actioned. Its ever evolving nature, grounded in a school vision, is indicative of both its character and contribution to the 'life-world' of educators. With a (CLUE being in no way a static language-construct, it generates mental maps that evolve over time and remain continually in a state of evolution as new knowledge is created. It is enhanced by contextually specific rich-metaphors and constantly updated via dialogic exchange, reflection and double-loop learning processes (Argyris & Schön, 1974). These processes feed the shared meaning system thus sustaining its presence and reinforcing the role that it plays in on-going school improvement. The presence of a (CLUE is therefore, a clue to sustainable quality practice and a key to the sustaining of a dynamic learning culture.

## 8.1 The Answers to the Research Sub-questions

Before addressing the answer to the Sub-question 3 the answers to the first two sub-questions are restated as they lead directly to the answer to Sub-question 3:

**Research Sub-Question 1: What are the fundamental characteristics of a contextually specific language in the lived experience of three Australian school communities that have undertaken a process of school revitalisation?**

The most fundamental characteristic of the contextually specific language in school communities that have undertaken the IDEAS process of school revitalisation is the generative nature of its three entwined components: *space into 'Place'* which occurs at the physical, relational and cognitive levels; cultural change as *space into 'Place'* creates new knowledge and collective commitment to change; and the daily language-in-use that both reflects and facilitates the change processes at play.

**Research Sub-Question 2: Of what significance is the presence and utilisation of this language-in-use within the 'life-world' of the educators at these schools?**

A CLUE is utilised by educators, both individually and together, leaders and teachers, to make rapid cognitive and relational connections which strengthen and deepen identity, understandings, pedagogy, justifications of pedagogy, and integrity of intent. Its presence and use leads to growth of purpose and collective commitment to on-going school improvement.

These previous understandings along with the wealth of data interpretation that preceded them herald the answer to the next question.

**Research Sub-Question 3: How can understanding the essence of such a language be of practical use in other school contexts?**

Emergent from these findings is an understanding that the essence of a CLUE is its mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship to school culture. A school with an identifiable CLUE is a school with a strong cultural identity capable of not only withstanding but thriving in the face of the winds of change. However, what has also become evident is that a culture reinforced and moulded by a CLUE requires leadership consciousness of its presence in order that it might be nurtured to ensure ongoing and sustainable growth. A school leadership team intent on building and sustaining a learning community should consciously take note of the language-in-use within the school's classrooms, staffroom/s, office and community meeting spaces, to note whether these spaces are just physical spaces or places where relational, cognitive and pedagogical connections occur.

These places do not just appear. They cannot just be 'rolled out' because a common pedagogical language would be a good idea. Instead the essential trace elements needed for the growth of a CLUE take time to be drawn together, scattered into the soil and then tilled. However, once the ground has been prepared the essential elements of 'clear protocols of engagement' and the development of parallel leadership capacity take effect. Together the parallel leadership team work 'in parallel', utilising strengths and developing relationships across the whole school community, that in turn facilitate the development of a contextually specific vision that has real meaning for the school community. It is from this vision that the seed of a CLUE is germinated.

For those leaders who move into a school possessing a strong culture and its inherent meaning system, it is important to acknowledge that it is something to be treasured and not taken for granted. Without the careful nurturing of parallel leadership and the protocols of engagement that ensure that trust and collective responsibility are priorities, then the learning culture will be lost.

For those leaders wishing to develop a learning culture enriched by a contextually specific meaning system, a proven process of school improvement is an invaluable tool for guiding the way forward. However the strongest indicator that sustainable quality practices are possible within schools is the distributed leadership concept of the metastrategic principal and teacher leaders working in harmony as a parallel leadership team. Parallel leadership is mutualistic and empowers teachers to take ownership of the change processes needed to ensure that ground level pedagogical change focussed on the learner takes place. It is wide-spread teacher leadership that points the way to sustainable school improvement.

## 8.3 The Implications for Other Contexts – Phase 4
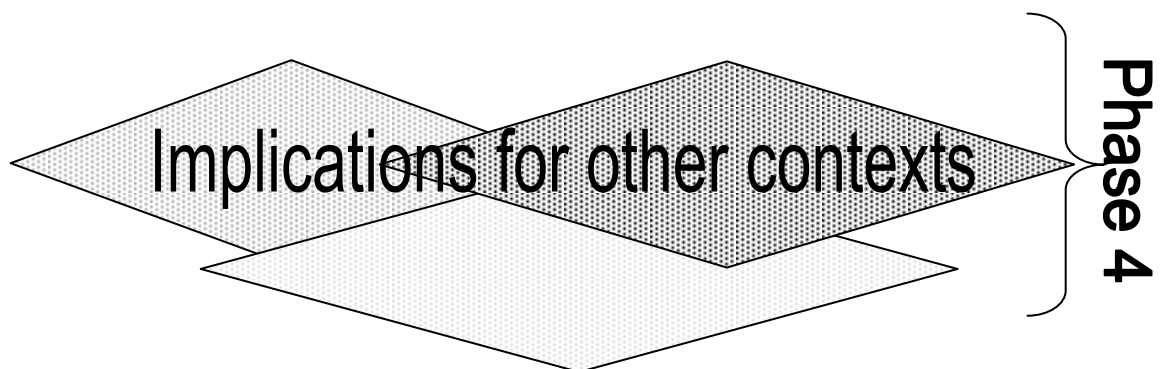


Figure 8.1 Implications of a ⊂LUE in other contexts

There are a number of implications from these research findings which are applicable across a number of fields, as is indicated by the overlapping planes within Figure 8.1. This final phase of the research project details how the characteristics of a ⊂LUE can be applied to other contexts:

- The use of rich-metaphor connected to a school's vision for the future is a powerful means of creating relational, cognitive and pedagogical connections.

- A shared meaning system within a school community is a prerequisite before lasting alignment of practice and school improvement can occur.

- School leaders must strategically consider facilitating a culture where a collectively developed metaphorically rich meaning system can develop, as the presence of a ⟨CLUE has the potential to strengthen cognitive and cultural connectedness across a whole school community, thereby ensuring that improvements in pedagogical practice are capable of being sustained.

- School culture and a school's language-in-use are so entwined that they are interdependent, therefore, conscious recognition of the link provides school leaders with a means of monitoring growth in school capacities – social, leadership and cognitive capacity – in order to ascertain specific areas of need. (This has implications for both resourcing and professional development.)

- All facets of a language construct work together. Therefore, the verbal, visual, actioned and structural manifestations of language must complement one another for a meaning system to be cohesive, and therefore useful as a portrayer of authentic shared meanings.

- Consciousness of the unique qualities of a contextually specific meaning system allows leaders to reinforce and reinvigorate it as need arises, however, the focus must not be on maintaining status quo but on sustaining on-going improvement, therefore, the language should continue to evolve.

- The building of parallel leadership capacity should be an imperative within schools. Parallel leadership ensures that systemic and metastrategic thinking become part of the language of the classroom. As leaders focus on student and teacher learning needs, pedagogical language increasingly becomes embedded into the language of leadership. This enables the bridging of the gap that sometimes exists between teachers and leaders to shrink thus enables deeply meaningful professional conversations to occur.

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- Although role specific understandings still exist, it is possible that the blended nature of a ⟨CLUE may contribute to the ability of schools – as communities – to sustain direction even when key personnel leave the school.

The final implication is the most fundamental of all. If schools aspire to create deep pedagogical and relational connections within – that are capable of on-going improvement – then it does not occur by accident. Instead a concerted desire by the majority must be actively engaged with. Such action, when led by a parallel leadership team and guided by an organised collaborative process capable of bringing the many facets of strategy, cohesiveness, practice, infrastructural needs and support mechanisms into synchronisation, points the way towards achievable school improvement. As engagement with such a process occurs, the existent culture will start to morph into one in tune with the needs of its clientele. New ways of thinking and acting collectively create new understandings which, when openly shared, critiqued, validated and revisited, facilitate the creation of a unique meaning system which in turn contributes to creating new understandings which further strengthen the learning culture.

## 8.4 The Answer to the Main Question

**Main Question:**

**Of what significance is the embedded presence of a contextually constructed ~~created~~ language-in-use within the lived experiences of school communities engaged in on-going school improvement?**

A contextually created language of understanding and engagement or a ⟨CLUE in the 'life-world' of school communities that have engaged with the process of school improvement called IDEAS, is the mirror to the collective soul or culture of the school in which it has evolved. It builds on the past so as to move confidently and inclusively into the future. It encapsulates the lived experiences of those who contributed to its creation. It is evidence of the capital that has been built within the school community. A ⟨CLUE facilitates and is facilitated by building social capacity, for, as Hopkins and Jackson (n.d.) state, "the skills of individuals can only be realised if the relationships within the schools are continually developing" (p.4).

> *That's what had come out of the original school report – parents wanted a shared vision – they wanted to be part of the processes within the school. The P and F [parents and friends group] have been incredible this year. They have asked and run a lot more parent sessions and meetings.*
>
> *The community is now so close – this has all just evolved. You can really see it in the kids too – their levels of learning and engagement have increased so much.* (St. Monica's Teacher Leader)

Cognitive capacity is built through professional conversations focussed on building the capacity of teachers to improve their practice in the areas that Newmann, King and Youngs (2000, pp. 5-6) define as being essential to building learning capacity: the knowledge, skills and attitudes of staff; commitment to working collaboratively within a learning community; program coherence and the sharing of quality resources. Their views are exemplified by this transcript quote:

> *We actually are all part of a whole and we will support and grow as a whole for the benefit of our students as a whole. The aides… also know the pedagogies that we know and share across the school because they were part of the development of these – part of the conversations that were carried out on an ongoing basis over a number of years.* (Sunny Fields Teacher Leader)

As both social capital and intellectual capital, guided by a collectively created school vision, values and set of guiding pedagogical principles or SWP expands, so too does organisational coherence (LRI, 2011) thus enabling school improvement over the long term. This sense of coherence is articulated in the following quote:

> *We are continually finding that we are one step ahead of the agenda. At a systems level the powers that be tend to leave us alone. In fact our planning and school improvement strategies are often held up as exemplars for other schools in the region. We are asked how we do it and other school leaders want to understand and implement the same sorts of strategies – many find this problematic as they do not have the sound relationships base – that alone shared vision, values and pedagogical*

*principles with which to work. At FHSS it is the culture of trust that has been built of many years that allows us to embrace challenge and change without fear. (*Forrester Hill Teacher Leader)

As with a composition or tune, a CLUE can also expand to embrace new voices as others join the community and in fact it resonates with a harmony of best practice derived from the combined lived experiences of the players within, both old and new. Due to its multilayered, multifaceted nature it can be utilised by all members of a school community at the levels of relational, cognitive and pedagogical understanding. In particular, it allows both teachers and leaders to share their passion and commitment to teaching and learning thereby contributing to the building of capacities needed for on-going school improvement to occur. The dynamic nature of a learning environment characterised by a CLUE and the consistency of the messages delivered, impacts on pedagogical practices, allowing micro-pedagogical deepening to take place. A continual cycle of innovation, investigation, evaluation of practice and reflection of practice, facilitated by a CLUE, empowers the collective to strive for further improvements.

## 8.5 Implications for Further Research

The nature of any research endeavour is that in searching for the answers to the research questions the researcher actually uncovers more questions. In the pursuit of the answers to the questions that guided this inquiry, other avenues worthy of exploration appeared. Initial ones that have aroused my curiosity and are worthy of further investigation are as follows:

**Further research: Avenue 1-** Due to the contextually specific nature of the schools used in this study, it would add a wealth of information to pursue a similar study in schools that had not undertaken the IDEAS process of school revitalisation but had in fact taken a different process or pathway to school improvement.

**Further research: Avenue 2-** All three schools within this study were primary schools. In general primary schools are smaller organisations than their larger secondary counterparts. It would add further insights into the concept of language-in-use as a reflection of school culture to undertake a similar study in a number of

secondary schools which have undertaken the same IDEAS process. In secondary contexts the role that students play in establishing and sustaining culture would add even greater variance and deeper understandings to this phenomenon.

**Further research: Avenue 3 -** This research touched on the experiences of a teacher working within an Early Childhood context and how the language of inclusion and the valuing of each child's gifts was fundamental to the way in which that particular learning centre operated. It would be beneficial to conduct similar research in other Early Childhood contexts, particularly in light of the renewed emphasis being placed on such centres becoming places of learning as well as places of care giving. A professional renewal process such as IDEAS could prove fundamental to the evolution of a language of learning and cultural change in early childhood settings.

**Further research: Avenue 4 -** Student voice could be heard wafting in and out of this data but it was beyond the reach of this research to investigate this more thoroughly, as this study was primarily focussed on uncovering the lived experience of teachers and leaders in schools. This being said, the significance of a ⟨CLUE in the lived experience of students, and to a lesser extent their families, would provide deeper understandings that would enrich knowledge about the importance of consciously developing significant shared meaning systems in schools.

**Further research: Avenue 5 -** With the current brain research in mind, and the clearly established need to build intellectual capacity within teachers and school communities, the creative aspects associated with mapping brain connections using cultural symbols and triggers for shortcutting complex understanding pathways, gains importance. Such considerations rarely feature in the research literature around building cognitive or intellectual capacity, and yet the indicators are there that this is an important even if neglected field of study, particularly in light of the role that organisational metaphor plays in establishing collective understandings within workplace culture.

## 8.6 Contributions to the Field of Educational Research

Throughout this journey of discovery I was continually amazed at the power of hermeneutic phenomenology to take me, as researcher, down unexpected avenues in order to pursue deeper meanings. At times the process itself appeared to dictate my space in this endeavour and it would take me a while to turn that space into a 'Place' of understanding. In order to exemplify the power of the process for others interested in pursuing the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway, in what follows I share excerpts taken from my reflections on the lived experience of the research journey, in order to inspire others within educational contexts to pursue the hermeneutic phenomenological research pathway. It may also help console others who are part way through their hermeneutic phenomenological journey and are still striving to discover their 'Place' within the direction the research is taking.

### 8.6.1 The researcher's 'lived experience' journal

While I was reading and exploring all the possible options available to me to conduct my investigation, it was as if hermeneutic phenomenology found me as much as I found it. I believe the keeping of a reflection journal to be a powerful means of exploring understandings and interpretations of an event or process as it unfolds. I recommend this documentation avenue to others following a hermeneutic research pathway. The following extracts from my Reflection Journal assist in the illustration of what I mean by this as I had kept track of my thinking throughout this hermeneutic phenomenological journey. The reflections captured here have been chosen to portray a sense of how I felt that at times I was compelled to go in one direction or another. They also document the 'Ah-ha moments!' that occurred when utilising this methodological approach.

The teacher inside me instantly related to Max van Manen's work and particularly to his thinking around pedagogical tact, the tone of teaching and how, as teachers, we must be able to respond to the variety of lived experiences of students so that learning is an authentic and empowering process (van Manen, 2002a, 2002b)

*So much of what I have become as a teacher and my deeply held beliefs about quality teaching practice are tied up in my knowledge that pedagogy should be based on shared articulation of what works best to engage and challenge our kids in our school. My practices as a researcher must therefore continually reflect this emphasis on shared understandings. It is not my voice that must be heard but the combined voices of all who have shared their experiences of this phenomenon.*

*It still seems odd that as soon as I had read van Manen's work that this approach just kind of took over my thinking, but hermeneutic phenomenology harmonises so well with my pedagogical principles and more than ever I am convinced that this approach is the right one for this inquiry.*

As I further explored the writings of hermeneutic phenomenological researchers in the teaching profession (Li, 2002); the nursing profession (Cameron, 2002); the experiences of patients (Hayne, 2002); and interpretations of artistic experiences (Montgomery-Whicher, 2002), I realised that this research approach was the one best suited to meet my needs, the needs of the participants and the requirements of the research questions themselves. However, even though I believed that a phenomenological research approach was the one for me, van Manen's interpretation of this approach needed to be reconceptualised in relation to what I wanted to extract from the data that I would be collecting.

I realised right from the start of adopting the hermeneutic phenomenological stance, that I would need to be open minded and receptive to the changes deemed necessary due to the interpretive process itself. An example of this need for openness and a willingness to change was made very clear when formulating and then working with and reworking the research questions themselves.

*The overarching research question evolved over time. I had very little say over the matter. The most fundamental difference being that originally I had used the wording of a 'contextually constructed language' but during the investigation it became clear that there was nothing constructed about this language. It grew in parallel with the creation of strengthening relationships within the school community, increasing knowledge, changing practices, teacher leadership, inclusive culture and staff commitment. Therefore later in the process this wording was changed to 'contextually created language' to indicate its organic nature.*

It was as I began to pursue the answers to the research questions that elements from other phenomenological perspectives began to weave themselves into the methodology. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) lenses of depiction, reduction to 'Essence' and interpretation of 'Essence' into living knowledge seemed the way to draw together the threads of the lived experiences which made up the majority of this data. The decision to use these as my way through the research maze, brought with it a sense of relief, as I imagined that I now had a step-by-step guide which could be followed in a fairly logically manner, until the 'Essence' of the phenomenon was found. I should have known this was not to be, for well before even partial completion of the Reduction Phase essence indicators began to appear.

*As I worked with the data, using Merleau-Ponty's lenses to search for meaning, I actually found that I was naturally combining essence depiction with reduction as the filtering process distilled the data to the essential which would indicate 'Essence'. It was from the essence that I could then look beyond to the wider understanding of the intentions and interpretations that were inherent in the distilled essence.*
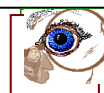
*"Phenomenology cannot take for granted the reality of the world ...and so has to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always speaks, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign language" (Merleau-Ponty,1964, p. ix)*

Not only did the initial commencement of the Reduction Phase quickly draw out possible 'Indicators of Essence' but also I found that elements of reduction were taking place in the Depiction Phase, and interpretations into living knowledge were continually occurring. It was as if the hermeneutic phenomenological process had taken on a life of its own. To some extent this was quite frustrating as I wanted to know what would be happening next. After all – it was supposed to be my research!

*The whole power of the hermeneutic phenomenological research technique continues to amaze me and it is becoming a recurring theme throughout my reflections on this research journey. It is as if the process used me to facilitate the research that needed to be conducted and in the way in which it wanted to be conducted.*

*Sometimes I have resented the detours it would take me on as I just wanted to 'get on with it' in my own way. However, I also sense that to be truly hermeneutic then these interpretations of 'where-to-next' – even if it means back tracking – must be listened to as they in turn are part of my lived experience in regards to this interpretive endeavour.*

After working within the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm for some time, I realised that the reason for the difficult to define nature of this research approach was its insistence on always returning to the whole. It is indeed not possible to dissect lived experience into carefully ordered parts, as dissection in this manner means that the connective tissue is no longer present. The power of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach to research is that through the stages of depiction, reduction and interpretation the importance of the whole is never lost to sight.

At times this was difficult to keep in view, as the intricacies of lived experience could easily have been broken into micro-parts, thus making them easier to examine. However, as long as the researcher keeps focussed on the main research question, it acts like the vision in an IDEAS school and helps to refocus and reconnect the research to what lies at the heart of the investigation. Keeping a reflection journal of the research journey itself added a wealth of data for further phenomenological image making to take place and also assisted in maintaining the 'bird's eye' view required.

## 8.6.2 Application to communication theory

Although this investigation did not set out to prove, or create, anyone particular theory of communication, a number of implications arose. There are many traditions in communication theory (for example, rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, socio-psychological, socio-cultural, and critical) with varying emphases being placed on behavioural messages, verbal messages, visual messages and those transmitted via signs and symbols.

This study points to the need to re-conceptualise communication theory, at least in a school context, in light of the everyday 'language-in-use' present within that context. Generally, communication practices are seen as the conduit between message givers and message receivers. The socio-cultural perspective sees communication as being tied to society, common practice, socialisation, identity and the co-construction of meaning. The phenomenological perspective sees communication as being related to experience, reflections, dialogue, and the openness of meaning making, while the

semiotic approach sees primary significance in signs, symbols, codes, icons and the mediums which convey messages.

I see the blending of the semiotic, phenomenological and socio-cultural perspectives that occurred within this study generating an awareness of language as a co-created meaning making system which is dependent on multifaceted modes of representation (including symbolism and metaphor) and reflective of pedagogical and culturally specific norms and assumptions.

By investigating the threads that make up the whole, the findings from this research point the way forward when analysing the practice of language, the evolution of language and the effect of language in its cultural context. Combined they point to the need to reconceptualise the 'what' of communication theory in the school context and possibly other contexts as well. These research findings suggest that no one theory is sufficiently robust to be adequate in itself.

## 8.6.3 Methodological implications

This thesis adds valuable new insights into the use of hermeneutic phenomenology as an educational research tool, and to van Manen's research using this method to explore pedagogical practices in context. It significantly raises the profile of this approach as being a thorough and insightful means of conducting educational research. In the past, the use of a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach has been well utilised in the fields of medicine and nursing (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Bottorff, 1991; Oiler, 1982); the arts (Gadamer, 1976); information technology (Winograd & Flores, 1986; Dourish, 2003); the social sciences (Dagenais, 1972; ); human science (Moustakas, 1994); and psychology (Giorgi, 1970), rather than in the field of education. The more I worked with this approach the more I became aware of its innate power to contribute knowledge to the field.

Although the data-collection method and the reconstructed *'Narratives of Significance'* within this research are closely aligned to that of a case study approach, the design of a series of 'Snapshots' was a far better fit in relation to what was trying to be achieved, due to the multi-layered nature of the phenomenon under investigation. The 'Snapshots' assisted in the distilling of the data down to its

essentials allowing the creation of 'Montages of Meaning' (also a form of 'Snapshot') to become possible.

The 'Snapshot' method of portraying data and interpretations of data could be incorporated into a case study approach to add further depth to the analysis, as each 'Snapshot' captures a thin slice of collective lived experiences over time. Each slice is transparent by nature, thus allowing other views to be seen and heard, while at the same time focussing the reader to a significant aspect under investigation. To add another layer to this 'Snapshots' approach it would be possible to add Knobel's horizontal snapshot approach to capturing a specific moment in time (Knobel, 1999) to my vertical 'Snapshot' approach which is theme related and not time specific.

The montagic 'Snapshot' approach transforms the researcher's task from that of writer to that of image maker and extends the view that the hermeneutic phenomenologist's task is one of writing and rewriting in order to capture the essence of a phenomenon (van Manen, 2002). My research has demonstrated that to portray a truly rich description of lived experience, the researcher needs to be imaging and re-imaging experiences, in other words representing experiences in multifaceted ways, rather than confining depiction to the written word alone. 'Montages of Meaning' have the ability to portray moments of clarity, point to 'Indicators of Essence', and suggest the silences of meaning which lend depth and clarity to the written or spoken word. With saying that I will conclude this thesis with a final metaphorically rich 'Montage of Meaning' that encapsulates what I see as the most important findings from this investigation.

## 8.7 The Concluding Montage of Meaning

The concluding montage has been designed to express the cultural essence of a ⟨CLUE in conjunction with each of the unique identities of the school communities which participated. Central to the montage is the green triangle representing Schein's underlying cultural assumptions that guide the way in which each of these schools functions as a learning community and a learning culture. Encircling the underlying assumptions are the three interwoven strands that make up both the characteristics of a ⟨CLUE and the culture detected within these contexts: space into "Place"; cultural change; and, language-in-use. Revolving around the pivotal point of a ⟨CLUE are

curved words or phrases that are placed to give meaning and to suggest movement as if the power of the current culture is propelling the school forward. The dynamic spread of cultural attributes is suggestive of the resultant eddies of energy and commitment that create the 'zone of resonance' which unites a school community in their ongoing endeavour towards school improvement.

Within each of these primary headings the creators and the identifiers of these characteristics radiate out from the central pivot point:

- Within space into "Place" the driving forces are parallel leadership and the establishment of a 'no blame' environment and the following attributes are the ones most obvious within the transformational process as space becomes place:

  - collectively created and adhered to mental models

  - trust and collective risk-taking

  - the preparedness to embark on a never-ending journey

  - the conveying of concise consistent messages

- Within cultural change the following driving forces of critical reflection and pedagogically based professional conversations have seen a cultural tendency towards the following evolve:

  - a passion for learners, learning and teaching has been reignited

  - the ability to appreciate and promote the hearing of multiple voices

  - the ongoing development of teacher leadership capacity

  - the consistent revisiting of need according to data in order to ensure authentic future direction

- Within the language-in-use that is heard on a daily basis within each school there is a definite focus on learning (both students and teachers) and the positive sense that together anything is possible. This language has a number of distinct characteristics, it is:

- pervaded by a unique school identity

- an artefact of the cognitive shift that has taken place within collegial interactions

- a complex language functioning at multiple layers, reinforced by metaphorical connections and with distinctly metastrategic undertones

- visually reinforced at every opportunity

Within the larger space that surrounds the three threads are words representative of the espoused values that were common to all schools, while the imagery depicts the most obvious traits and symbolism within the artefacts that are unique to each setting. The various combinations of these multifaceted texts are the explicit expressions of the underlying assumptions underpinning each of these unique but strongly linked communities.

There are silences too within this montage. Without these silences the expressions of meaning would be lost and the 'Ah-ha moments' would lack impact, thus preventing the sparks of transcendence from taking flight (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In totality what is portrayed is a culture that has been facilitated by the contextually created language of understanding and engagement which in turn has been facilitated by the dynamically evolving culture evidenced in its words and multiple stereo imaging.

Montage 8.1 The concluding montage



From this hill we will soar

that facilitates and is facilitated by

Growing beautiful futures in the valley of opportunity

collectively created & adhered to 'mental maps'

trust & collective risk-taking

a never ending journey

concise consistent messages

Space into Place

parallel leadership

no blame

CCLUE

KITES

SMARTS

Language-in-use

unique indentity

artefact of cognitive place

multilayered, metastrategic & metaphorical

visually reinforced

learning focus

positive

pedagogical

critically reflective

Cultural change

passion

listening to multiple voices

teacher leadership

authentic future direction

challenging

guides direction

full of potential

community owned

sustains the narrative

built on the past

pedagogically dense

future focused

authoritative

inclusive

inspirational

collectively owned

celebratory

student centred

micro & macro focused

student friendly

powered by (MSI) Mental Stereo Imaging

empowering

unique

A meaning making system

on-going school improvement

Growing together - Learning forever

B.U.D.S.

B.U.D.S.

BUDS & TWIGS

Forrester Hill

Supporting Each Other

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# Appendices

| The collation of notable points from the Sunny Fields Principal transcript | |
|---|---|
| • Choosing activities that promote community involvement<br>• No longer her class and my class but one<br>• Pedagogy became completely aligned<br>• Students felt comfortable no matter which teacher was in front of them<br>• Transparent pedagogy<br>• Effective pedagogy – no time to waste<br>• Needing to bring others into the loop meant having to articulate and document pedagogy<br>• Important not to shut others out<br>• Bringing in other's ideas and pedagogical practices<br>• Living it – breathing it time to write it down<br>• Needed to be written down so that others could understand and share in it<br>• Pedagogy can change but don't lose the best of what was<br>• New understandings of authoritative pedagogies mean changes in practice that must be incorporated into schoolwide pedagogy (literacy training)<br>• Bringing the new person on board requires conscious effort and focussed conversations<br>• Complete openness and transparency can be interpreted as lack of trust in another's professionalism<br>• Not knowing what a 'no blame' environment can be threatening<br>• Support and growth based on student need<br>• Parallel leadership provides strength in times of change (teacher aide knows how to run the school)<br>• Praise from systemic leadership on how we handle mediation in the school around the loss of a teacher<br>• Challenges can be dealt with when relationships are strong<br>• Continual interaction and reflection<br>• Promoting student voice | • Seamless movement from one year to the next gives security to students<br>• Recognition of own skills and where they can be best utilised<br>• Taking note of the data on a monthly basis so that changes can be made where needed and no student falls too far behind<br>• Targeting human and financial support to greatest student needs<br>• Students are sharing our language of teaching and learning (mimicking what teachers say)<br>• The uniqueness of our language<br>• People like the feel of the school – in part the language creates this feel<br>• The language they hear is a point of reference for what they hear elsewhere even though it may not be a conscious act<br>• Learning to read the messages from others<br>• Including our school values as a kind of pledge on parade<br>• Linking quality behaviours to celebrations has seen huge improvements in behaviour<br>• The importance of the website for connecting families to who we are as a school community<br>• Our vision 'sells' our school to others<br>• A rich-metaphorical vision and image can be interpreted and applied in different ways<br>• Photos of values in action connected students to what they meant and connected visitors to what we valued<br>• Our aides feel devalued when student teachers or supply teachers treat them in a manner related to a traditional hierarchical manner<br>• A strong sense of self-worth and empowerment has been developed<br>• Whole school commitment to who and what we stand for<br>• Dramatic change in P&C level of support and acceptance of decisions |

- Parents supporting the school by promoting our strengths in the wider community
- For quality learning outcomes to be achieved there must be consistency of understanding and practice
- Visuals informed a visiting teacher that the process was growing and evolving within the school
- Internalising external imperatives
- Using the data to inform practice
- Adding value with new ideas
- Valuing the input of others
- Strategic planning aligning present capacity with future direction – evaluating need to build capacity in certain areas (metastrategic leadership)
- The need for clarity of pedagogy by placing vision at the centre
- Flexibility and adaptability are a part of effective pedagogy
- Celebrating developing of learning in others
- The conscious choice of a rich-metaphor that student could relate to
- Collecting own data not relying on systemic data only
- Developing student leadership and tackling problems at the same time
- Focussing on pedagogy meant focussing on developing problem solving and risk taking skills
- Adding value and embracing the talents and gifts of others
- There are growing pains when developing the leadership skills of others – as certain departmental boundaries still have to be maintained (metastrategy – the balancing act)
- Visuals capture who and what we are and where we have come from
- Bouncing ideas off each other – we never feel alone
- Asking provoking questions of self and others
- Leadership that is aware – mindful of the needs of others
- Giving the right messages

- <span style="color:green">Clear link between Vision and values and parents enrolling students in the school numbers have risen by over 20 students</span>
- Students have a strong sense of school identity
- All part of a whole
- Tracking each student
- Improving pedagogies used –creating alignment and consistent messages for teaching and learning
- Being a teaching principal the conversations are metastrategy laced with classroom needs and practice
- Raising expectations
- Focussed on creating independent learners
- Relevant learning is authentic learning
- Looking at what practice is leading to (Meta strategy)
- Acknowledging the need to change is the first step of the journey
- Empowering students as learners no matter what their ability (gifted writer)
- Living the vision
- Strength through team work
- Addressing parent priorities
- Developing student voice through leadership skilling, team skilling, social skilling
- Knowing how far we have come in our understanding of our pedagogical language and actions (relief teachers)
- Contrasting then and now gives a real sense of the extent of change that has occurred
- The strength of an appealing vision that establishes a unique identity

| The collation of notable points from the Sunny Fields new teacher transcript | |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Conversations spin back to what does this or that mean for our children</li><li>Everything relates back to our vision, values or pedagogy that is clear</li><li>Everything is viewed through a lens of what's best for our kids</li><li>All they ever do is talk teaching and learning – sometimes they have to be reminded to have fun</li><li>Parents understand our goals and have come on board</li><li>Finding ways to authentically praise can be difficult if students have lost heart and that makes the effort even more important</li><li>The honesty and willingness of staff to share is valuable</li><li>Seeing the change in concrete ways (on returning)</li><li>The clarity and sense of focus that comes with aligned pedagogy brings renewed energy and positivity</li></ul> | <ul><li>There is now real direction</li><li>Catering for individual needs knowing each child intimately</li><li>Developing close relationships with students and their families</li><li>Being supportive moves people forward (PE)</li><li>Active learning in the early years</li><li>Matching student interests and student pace (preps wanting to read)</li><li>We're working together parent included</li><li>Comparing practice improves practice</li><li>New students joining our school emphasise how far our students have progressed in the development of their gross motor skills</li><li>Constantly reflecting changing evaluating reflecting (meta-cognition)</li><li>Raised expectations can prove challenging to those not involved in the journey who then have further to travel to meet the challenge</li></ul> |

| The collation of notable points from the Sunny Fields teacher leader transcript | |
|---|---|
| • Assessing the prior knowledge of students – not relying on assumptions<br>• 100% of students above the national minimum standards by the time they leave Yr 7<br>• Quality parallel leadership teachers and aides working in partnership (built by metastrategic leadership)<br>• Fine-tuning practice<br>• Making things fit with our philosophical approach<br>• Focussing on possibilities<br>• A collective approach to celebrating literacy and numeracy week<br>• A preparedness by others to share the leadership load<br>• Empathising with others helps to remove the tendency to blame<br>• Individualising practice to meet the needs of each child<br>• Practicing caring and aware pedagogy<br>• The arts teacher complementing classroom learning – an integrated teaching team<br>• Never getting where you want to be – there is always a new challenge and need for improvement in some area (high expectations)<br>• A language of action based on student needs – giving the reasons for the need to change and then providing strategies with which to proceed | • Making learning more active<br>• Building on success<br>• Choices are discriminatory based on ability to meet student need (choosing reading schemes)<br>• We have confidence and information to back our beliefs<br>• We are all heading in the same direction<br>• Acknowledging the gifts and talents of others<br>• Creating opportunities for the community to be involved<br>• Developing leadership in others (PE teacher)<br>• Bringing concepts to life<br>• It's no longer us and them it's a partnership with parents<br>• Looking for glimmers of positivity in students something to praise, something to build on<br>• Enabling engaging and empowering part-timers<br>• The emphasis on active learning and physical activity echoes the emphasis placed on hands on authentic learning by parents and students<br>• Open sharing of reflections, disappointments and successes<br>• Promoting growth – building capacity in teacher aide - reaping rewards<br>• Empowering qualities of developing parallel leadership |

# Appendix B: Notable points from Forrester Hill

| The collation of notable points from the Forrester Hill Principal transcript |
|---|

- Deep understanding/ Making connections/ Powerful practice
- Layering action/ meanings/Another way of doing things/ Best solutions
- Attitudes and pride/ Uniqueness
- Creating & Embracing opportunities/ Acceptance of challenge/ Appreciating opportunities/ Enjoying the moment
- Valuing opinions/ Level playing field/ Difference as strength/No blame
- Living our vision/the words/the values/ Clear sense of identity
- Relating /Linking to V,V & SWP/enacting
- Kids centred/Nurturing students/celebrating students/student leadership
- Fostering responsibility/ collective/ individual/ownership of actions
- High expectations (starts with principal)
- Commitment to the whole/to self/to others/ to kids/to teaching/ to love of craft
- Leaders must know themselves/internal strength/reflect/Internally driven/listen/exemplify & espouse values/learn
- Creating alignment/Unified approach to big issues
- Building on positives promotes acceptance of change/Retaining and building onto
- Hope/not being overloaded/

- Allowing room to grow/space to grow/ to understand/ engaging/to learn/with parameters
- Celebrating individuality/ Recognising own talents/ Understanding self/unique identity/ Empowering
- Understanding takes place in staff meetings/whiteboard
- Drawing people closer together/ Connectedness/ Making myself available/ Interactions between staff
- Resolving difference/Creating own solutions/
- Forrester Hill Family Community involvement/ Live & breathe family/home/Knowledge of each other
- Improving communication
- Fostering/Valuing relationships/ valuing others/Respect/ Trust /Care and acceptance/ Support
- 1+1 =3 /Go the extra mile/ Reaching deeper
- Authenticity
- Clarity of intent/clarity of direction
- Part of a team/Team work cycle/ Working together
- Professionalism/perception of needs/Enriching learning
- Pushing to reach potential/Individual growth/ Confidence
- Sustaining spirit/ Enlightenment/ Travelling the journey together
- Respecting as a two way street/ Students acknowledge teachers/ Liking and engagement are different

| The collation of notable points from the Forrester Hill teacher transcript |
|---|
| <ul><li>Consistency of planning/Clear guidelines/ Detailing understandings – going micro/ Aligning priorities/clear roles and responsibilities/ Mobility of practice/alignment</li><li>Principles and strategies support best way of doing things/ Connecting to SWP</li><li>Quality conversations/ Conscious of getting the message across/ Keeping in contact/Conveying clear messages</li><li>Explicit teaching/ Targeted teaching/Teachers leading learning/ Learning curves/ Learning partnerships</li><li>Authentic/realistic about progress/acceptance of distance travelled/ acknowledgement of distance still to travel/ Accepting the need to change/ Celebrating movement forward</li><li>Shared understandings/ Deep understanding</li><li>Grasping opportunities/ Utilising external expertise</li><li>Embedding SWP</li><li>Clear articulated roles and responsibilities/ Articulation andsynthesising</li><li>Social skilling</li><li>Creative pedagogy/ Creative forms of expression/</li><li>Tying threads together/ Systemic/strategic understandings</li><li>Articulating priorities according to need/ Forrester Hilling external imperatives/</li><li>Giving the message to everyone/ Reinforcing with</li></ul> | <ul><li>Reviewing and updating according to data and collective reflection</li><li>Complementary nature of pedagogies we embrace</li><li>Questioning our actions seeking improvement at all times/Answering key questions</li><li>Before & now comparisons create strong thread of commitment to not lose what we have got</li><li>Engaging kids/ Providing what might be missing at home</li><li>Accessibility of staff to parents and students/open door policy/ Responsive to community members</li><li>Active involvement in decision making/collective decision making</li><li>Creating opportunities to share (students)/ Creating chances/ Every child has every chance to learn /Accepting opportunities as they arise/ Creating a variety of opportunities to feel connected and to learn/ Supporting creativity/ Community empowerment</li><li>Meeting needs/ Responsive to concerns/ Improving skills/becoming better teachers</li><li>Confronting difficulties with positivity/ Challenging space generates passion/ Challenge started our PLC</li><li>Celebrating professionalism in others/collegial respect</li><li>Support/safe haven/ for school from community/</li><li>Depth of dialogue/Professional dialogue linked to sustainability</li><li>Not giving up on kids</li><li>Meaning & metaphor -</li></ul> |

| | |
|---|---|
| staff and parents by student/ Representing meaning in different mediums <br>• Building strong foundations <br>• Reinforcing culture through conversation/songs/visuals/ drama <br>• Unique identity/strength in who are/ <br>• Celebrating self/ celebrating difference <br>• Acknowledging others/ Reciprocal caring/ Reaching out/accepting help/ Give support/Giving credit <br>• Personalised learning – social and academic <br>• Stepping back reflecting/ no pain no gain/understanding self/self-actualisation <br>• Making space/ to learn/time/hearing point of view <br>• No blame culture/ The way we talk to each other/ Welcoming <br>• Change takes time/ Dreaming phase/ High ideals/ <br>• Quality relationships/ Valuing others – mediation <br>• Leaders taking the time to connect | Nurturing/jacaranda tree/roots/trunk/leaves/flowers/PODS <br>• Review-refocus/ Concentrating/ <br>• Solid foundations/hanging it all together on the tree/ <br>• Communication tools/power symbols/ <br>• Cohesive <br>• Opportunity to step out/step forward and on/ Going back – moving forward <br>• Empowering students/choice <br>• Responsibility for the well-being of others <br>• Connecting to students using different text types/multiple intelligences/ Creating the links <br>• Individualised attention/ Empathising with students/ <br>• Valuing past efforts (vision creation- soul searching) <br>• Reference points to reflect against <br>• Making the external fit/Forrester Hilling things/ |

**The collation of notable points from the Forrester Hill new teacher transcript**

- Valued staff/ Valuing others/ Adding value/Contributions valued/
- Empowered staff/ Reaching potential/ A feeling of "I can! We can!"
- Positive school mood/ Hope
- Heralding opportunities / Open opportunities /Possibilities
- Inclusiveness not time related but willingness related
- Integrity
- Big picture systemic/ Big picture of student needs
- Celebrating professionalism
- Giving responsibility /Showing trust
- Collegial sharing/ Give and take
- Team centred
- Meaning making through metaphor/"Why" conversations create meaning /Common understandings/Multiple places that meaning takes place/Multiple spaces that meaning takes place
- Celebrating individuality/Maintaining individuality is a strength
- Neutral mediation space/Resolving differences
- Encouragement/Warm encouraging space for students
- Safety/Support/Care
- Offering inclusion/ Never feel alone/ Sense of belonging/ Cosy
- Banishing preconceptions

- Authoritative pedagogies
- Alternative approaches embraced
- Language of insight/ Mindful of future needs
- Clearly defined leadership expectations
- The language of parallel leadership/ Parallel Leadership alive
- Acknowledging gifts/strengths of others
- Leadership responsibility embraced
- Student centred/Not self-centred
- Collective commitment /All on board
- High established expectations/ Best outcomes
- Establishing trust
- Stepping back to step forward
- Upholding dignity (Individual dignity & worth
- Acceptance of starting points to understanding and growth
- Purposeful dialogue and action/ Articulation of goals
- Ability to turn words into actions/ Goals made achievable
- Incidental language reinforcing culture/ Authentic language/ Natural not contrived
- Links to vision, values & SWP/Visual connections
- Learning communities have the potential to be exclusive

**The collation of notable points from the Forrester Hill teacher leader transcript**

- Significant change in mindset
- Open sharing and pedagogical exploration
- Using data to ascertain student needs
- Futuristic nature of the dialogue – articulation of learning for life
- Emphasis on equipping students for a world of change
- Translation of new knowledge into action
- The creation of a PLC where reflection, identification, articulation and sharing of ideas and practice is commonplace
- Equipping students for a world of change
- Vision and SWP embedded in language and documents
- Prepared to seek out the expertise of others
- The story of a teacher who went from disconnected to reconnected – empowered by the process
- Language that created cognitive, emotional and personal connections
- Pedagogy that creates opportunities
- Relationships the basis for learning to occur
- The protocols encourage provide the framework within which relationships are built
- Developing student voice
- Students taking responsibility for improvements and actions within school
- Climate of trust and celebration
- Symbolism of the tree means something fundamental to students
- Newcomers can feel that they are on the 'outside' (students or staff)
- It is possible to consciously embrace new people and new ideas
- Promoting confidence builds confidence
- The branches of the pedagogy have layers of meaning and application within practice
- Moments of silence provide the

- Deep conversation are happening
- There is always more that needs doing s raised expectations and attention to data means that needs become more obvious and less easy to ignore
- Money is spent according to the prioritising of needs
- The presence of a continual 'mindfulness' and attentiveness to what is happening and what needs to happen
- Celebrating learning and behaviour creates a culture of valuing and positivity
- Creating connections through the use of rich-metaphor
- Capturing the essence of the metaphor in multimodal texts across the school provides constant reminders of who and what we are
- Creative ways to solve problems (Graffiti - wall)
- The importance of a strong induction program that gives into the culture of the school both for families and new staff
- Celebration! Celebration!
- Stepping back in time reinforces the movement forward
- Care and nurturing are both indicative of the past and the present at Forrester Hill
- No matter how strong a staff is at any one time it is still easy to lose direction without quality metastrategic leadership
- Capturing the links through visual imagery adds strength to the thinking process and leaves an historical records which makes it easy to trace the development of ideas
- An image that connects to a whole community creates a connection between vision and relationship development
- Involving the community is at times difficult but creative thinking is the key

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| space to think and therefore, create individual cognitive connections<br><br>• For effective sharing to occur there must be common understanding created by developing agreed meanings to words and their application into action<br><br>• Understanding takes place in learning partnerships, staff meetings, individual reflection<br><br>• Maintaining moments of silence when PLCs meet is difficult but rewarding as it provides the space that allows thinking to go beyond the immediacy of the last comment made<br><br>• Moving forward in small steps<br><br>• revisiting past can mean that old practices need to be used again<br><br>• The continued evolution of a PLC is cyclical in nature<br><br>• Reflecting on personal teaching practice (action research) in detail is the key to improving practice<br><br>• Sharing improved practice encourages others to improve and provides a bank of quality practices<br><br>• Understanding the individual nature of colleagues and students creates connections and builds relationships (Myer Briggs, multiple intelligences)<br><br>• The role of the metastrategic leader is to guide, advice, support and channel action – at times this requires stepping back<br><br>• Creative use of time and human resources allows space for professional reflection and learning<br><br>• Being one step ahead | • The personal touch works wonders<br><br>• A rich-metaphor is one that can be applied to many aspects of the school and the actions that occur within it<br><br>• Students relate in a personal manner to the symbolism of the tree<br><br>• Real communication commenced as a place on the floor in the middle of a circle<br><br>• Observing the protocols can become second nature – however, these are taken for granted they can be lost<br><br>• Reinforcement and revisiting of protocols keeps them alive<br><br>• Reinforcement and revisiting pedagogical principles keep them alive<br><br>• Revisiting principles may mean that they will have to change as they no longer embrace the insights of new staff or meet the needs of new students<br><br>• Specifics such as how to edit a piece of writing need to be consistent – a common pedagogical language is the first step in creating consistency and alignment<br><br>• Needs met according to priorities<br><br>• Retreating to a world of blame is easy and unprofessional<br><br>• Using the rules of skilful discussion were a catalyst for change<br><br>• Authoritative pedagogies and frameworks add value to the contextually constructed language and allows for more authentic self-analysis<br><br>• Success breeds success and celebration rewards the turning of words and conviction into action |

# Appendix C: Notable Points from St. Monica's

| The collation of notable points from the St. Monica's Principal transcript | |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Congenial from the beginning – not as far to move in relationships</li><li>Sometimes you have to sell an idea (leader perspective)</li><li>The concept of journey is very strong</li><li>A main focus team but everyone on board</li><li>Personal invitations got people on board</li><li>Creating meetings targeting parents</li><li>Ownership by major stakeholders</li><li>Keeping records gives substance to the journey</li><li>How different each journey is even the process is pretty standard</li><li>Drawing ideas together in creative and targeted ways (to form the vision and SWP)</li><li>Conversations stimulated by photocards worked well with creative/visual staff better than at other school</li><li>Taking time away from the mayhem is important</li><li>Open conversations happen all around – there is a trust space that just allows teachers to say what a bad session they just had because they hadn't been properly prepared for this or that or did not know about this or that – they ask for help this happens a lot in the staffroom but the understanding has already taken place in their classrooms</li><li>Teachers just talking and planning together</li><li>Our organisational meeting is ½ hr one morning and our PD is then in the afternoon when we can clear our head space for learning</li><li>A real learning community</li><li>Great question – How does the authoritative stuff change and inform our practice? Why should it?</li></ul> | Leadership<ul><li>Linking-linking</li><li>Bits and pieces are happening but true alignment is still to come (keeping the road ahead in sight)</li><li>Changing culture evidenced as teachers initiating ideas starting their own journeys to some extent that run parallel to our collective one</li><li>Starting with little steps – sometimes we have to push things along and then we can just stroll for a while</li><li>Creative resourcing by leadership</li><li>Parallel leadership is created through the words and actions of those at the top</li><li>Time creativity use –metastrategic leadership</li><li>ISMT diminished as our way of working included everyone – an evolution</li><li>My vision was to skill others – metastrategic leadership</li><li>Anyone of us could lead – confidence and trust</li><li>Authoritative readings contribute to widening the space of understanding</li><li>My own study journey contributes to the learning journey of others as I bring things to the group</li><li>I see it in many many places - You know the journey itself is the space</li><li>Connection allows us to make our space overlap</li><li>Celebrations are in themselves important messages</li><li>The power of a partner – mentors and admin down</li><li>Different levels of mentoring</li><li>A challenge of our vision is student voice – still growing</li><li>Common good is also about ownership</li></ul> |

- Deep conversations and application to classroom practice were magic
- Change in one area flows into change in another
- Reflection has meant the need to go back to teacher handbook and redo some of it – not all of it but to capture our present understandings
- Changing policies
- Pre-assessment has helped teachers focus more on movement forward and milestone points not just the learning journey.
- Share across stages and assessment tools and talking about what the data means
- Teachers tend to know the emotional, social and academic strengths well but the deficits and small step points towards building these strengths come with data exploration.
- We have started this journey – the data now informs decisions we also have to get better at documenting observations in class in order to see movement forward – not just the obvious
- As we talk I can even more clearly see how it all fits together
- Parent pride, voice and support of what is happening – bringing it back to D...
- Others are hearing about our school – they speak positively and find what we are doing interesting
- The understanding and feeling of 'this is who we are' demonstrated by students going to high school interviews
- The proof of the words – the vision the SWP is in the actions I see all the time
- Talking of vision and SWP as living
- Celebration is so important – that feeling of excitement and the getting together meant that the vision and principles were being talked about and seen everywhere – a lot of understanding happened right then and there for parents

- Engaging staff – even if it takes time – gives ownership (DI )
- Teachers are prepared to admit fear – that is good then I really know where to support them
- We are aiming for three week reflection points for teachers to compare what is happening
- Relationships between teacher and student rely on engagement and differentiation this requires a different sort of organisation
- A challenge of our vision is student voice – still growing
- Common good is also about ownership
- Engaging staff – even if it takes time – gives ownership (DI example)
- Teachers are prepared to admit fear – that is good then I really know where to support them
- We are aiming for three week reflection points for teachers to compare what is happening
- Relationships between teacher and student rely on engagement and differentiation this requires a different sort of organisation

General
- Teacher cognitive understandings going to a higher level
- Any journey is challenge as no one knows what is around the corner
- Focussed conversations and actions
- Humour helps make connections
- Can't teach metacognition without being a reflective practitioner
- Words such as knowledge and innovation etc mean different things to different people
- Common understanding of terminology is necessary to move forward as a team.
- Creativity, initiative and willingness to go the extra mile
- Teachers prepared to admit inadequacies and ask for help
- Movement forward based on professional dialogue, trust and

- It's a language of possibilities and looking forward while treasuring back – a futuristic language
- School like a rabbit warren – nice to change but can change practice regardless
- Teachers find it difficult to connect spatial openness to different ways of thinking and doing – that will come
- I used to teach in a circle - kids did not have their own table – this gave so much back to me as a teacher
- Teachers looking at roles in different ways – children also making decisions
- Creating ownership of learning from a class perspective
- Let's together develop our understandings
- Points along the continuum
  Few common words ….Common Words with little common meaning…common words and common meaning…common meaning brings common understanding of ways to move forward….common understanding means ability to action….ability to action is carried through into action…action is reflected on through common understandings….

Understanding takes place:
- Professional development sessions are another place where understanding takes place – real understanding now because PD is targeted to need.
- How students are using the language 'one girl talking to another said "well you know you have to have this knowledge because without the knowledge you can't have success".
- Another teacher was saying how in her class they have a little boy with a brain injury – the other kids were celebrating his achievements and telling him all the ways he had flown his kite high that day

Leadership
- Consider the mix of groups to promote chances of success

- leadership attributes
- Creating the links and mapping interrelatedness of parts to the whole
- Open and transparent – inclusive
- Widening the circle of influence from teachers to parents
- Parent voice becoming more powerful
- Giving to the parents –they give back to school reciprocal relationships
- Opening the conversation to students – targeting their level of understanding
- Rooms full of ideas – displays the importance of the visuals
- A vision for learning
- Enrichment from the past adds quality to the future
- Spending time- no matter how busy you are - creates the energy and commitment to move forward
- Elements of serendipity – the magical moments (language is a conduit for magical moments)
- Connecting to spirituality and past
- Space to reflect is very important – quiet time
- The journey is a process of creating connections
- Our vision, values and SWP has opened up 'the way' removed some of the barriers
- De-mystified – for parents and teachers – all see a bigger picture of what we do and why we do it
- Metacognition has been opened up to parent understanding so that can feel a part of it all and support the concept at home
- There is a change in the quality of the conversations – an openness that creates understanding
- Articulating reasons for timing of events – to maximise effect
- It's a challenge to give student's voice
- Making decisions according to student needs and community ones

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| • (metastrategic thinking)<br>• Leadership focus on to point out how new challenges can still be fitted into the old boxes<br>• It's all part of the same journey even if occasionally there may be detours – every detour is an enrichment of understanding that can be contributed to the ongoing journey<br>• Putting things into our focus<br>• eachers accept that I have passions and I don't try and hide them<br>• They know how I worked in my classroom – credibility and authenticity with staff<br>• It's about giving teachers more – helping them understand, empower, succeed all possible if you have the vision right (What does this mean? Right as in capture the minds and hearts of people) | • collective need – subsets<br>• Sometimes the leadership team just have to do things because of time restraints – the others accept this though as we always inform and include where possible<br>• Ownership is so important or things crash<br>• Student use of language is language-in-action (more so than teachers)<br>• So much of an en-active language are the questions that are embedded throughout it.<br>• Always talking about starting points – an outsider would see this as being way down the track<br>• The concept of 'common good' is a catholic teaching that resonates well with IDEAS and how we work now. Not that we didn't before –but there was still a bit of 'I want' whereas now it is 'we need' |

| The collation of notable points from the St. Monica's Assistant Principal transcript | |
|---|---|
| • Having to put things on hold to concentrate – prioritising<br>• Developing good professional learning teams – learning communities<br>• Rich conversations happening daily<br>• Assessing and discussing need – open communication<br>• Seeing self as learner<br>• Umbrellaring everything<br>• Focussing on rich learning tasks<br>• Differentiating learning<br>• Allowing students to take responsibility<br>• Empowering students to make decisions<br>• Individualising builds strength<br>• Thinking, conversing, reflecting and taking the time<br>• Relating to the kites and the strength of the metaphor<br>• Reassurance from leadership<br>• Excitement at being one step ahead<br>• The hard work was justified | • Negotiating and discussing part of classroom practice<br>• Asking parents to share responsibility for students learning<br>• Common language guiding practice<br>• Differing places in the journey<br>• Creating hands on experiences and innovation<br>• Connections are stronger now<br>• All on the same page - Reinforcing language and expectations with parents<br>• Consideration of induction for casual teachers to introduce the language to them.<br>• Supply teacher picking up on the reflection aspect of each teaching session – the kids look forward to it.<br>• Valuing what we had done<br>• It's a journey<br>• Students taking it on board<br>• Creating and valuing identity |

| The collation of notable points from the St. Monica's teacher leader transcript | |
|---|---|
| <ul><li>Pride in the uniqueness of vision</li><li>Inevitability of KITE Pedagogy from vision – the serendipity</li><li>The fun nature of the image connects with students</li><li>Initially no shared language even about values – fundamental inconsistencies</li><li>Discussing and clarifying the meaning of the vision words – creating a shared meaning system</li><li>Taking the time to make the understandings explicit</li><li>Teachers journaling and reflecting</li><li>Dedicated time to developing common understandings</li><li>Exploring authoritative pedagogies</li><li>Synthesising authoritative, COC and research findings</li><li>Collective responsibility for professional learning</li><li>Owning process and movement forward</li><li>Understandings embedded well as everyone was participating in learning and discussion</li><li>Working to make meaning clear and useable</li><li>Developing depth of meaning</li><li>Long way to go but such a long way from the start</li><li>Celebrating and showing pride</li><li>Direction shown by leadership with KITES on their mind</li><li>Focussing on metacognition, integration, differentiation</li><li>Teachers working in partnerships of learning</li><li>Facilitating focus areas in classroom practice</li><li>Looking for ways to improve</li><li>The components of</li></ul> | <ul><li>Developing programs with matrix in mind, finding the places to reinforce</li><li>Indentifying gaps and filling them</li><li>Intervention groups and social skills groups – training aides to assist</li><li>Teacher aides initiating support measures</li><li>Aides empowered to contribute</li><li>parallel leadership</li><li>Self-evaluation, self-improvement and peer assessment</li><li>Our understandings of kites are embedded in planning (not the words themselves)</li><li>Describing the understandings and participation by students</li><li>Articulating the power of the metaphor for both teachers and students</li><li>Parents also relate to the metaphor and how it connects to our spiritual roots</li><li>Positive relationships the foundation on which learning grows</li><li>Verification of beliefs important for parents – parents wanted to share the vision</li><li>Evolution of parent involvement to the point of parent's running meetings</li><li>Students have high expectations of themselves and their teachers</li><li>Significant improvement in NAPLAN results</li><li>Discovering the need to change and changing to meet the need</li><li>Wanting to get things right</li><li>Recording the special times as</li></ul> |

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| empowerment, innovation, negotiation are incorporated into practice<br>• Developing matrix to show understanding of principles<br>• Visioning encouraged us to share<br>• Gaining an expanded range of ideas<br>• No longer scared to give advice<br>• Professionalism coming to the fore<br>• Planning, recording and naming practice<br>• Others noticing quality of student learning (Supply teachers) | visuals is important<br>• Being given the freedom to try new things<br>• No fear of failure<br>• Concept of no blame<br>• Justifying the things that I do with authority<br>• Having the language to go forward<br>• Shared language shared understandings<br>• Using the language with others no matter where I am (year levels)<br>• Opening mind's eye to new views<br>• Taking the time – don't rush (the vision)<br>• Linking to spirituality |

| The collation of notable points from the St. Monica's Principal transcript | |
|---|---|
| • The kites clarify what the school stands for<br>• Location on hill resonates with vision – feels right<br>• The kites makes connections with kids<br>• Breaking down understandings is made simple by Kites<br>• Clearly articulating SWP and what it means even though new to the school (6 months)<br>• KITES appeals to all ability levels and age groups<br>• Taking my knowledge and adding value in new context<br>• Peer tutoring – not all coming from teacher<br>• Accessing knowledge and moving that knowledge around<br>• Valuing the contribution of others in your team – everyone has something to add<br>• Creative strategies for engaging students and promoting collaborative learning<br>• Asking for feedback is again highlighted as a part of everyday practice<br>• Reflecting on how groups handle things differently (metacognition)<br>• Kids inputting into celebrations<br>• Look like sound like feel like when we are learning<br>• The language is part of everyday school life<br>• Our pamphlet – visual reminder for planning of all aspects and how they fit together<br>• Questioning content and practice<br>• Celebrating successes with parents through newsletter<br>• Celebrating vision unified community | • Students can share the understanding space<br>• Students vocalising learning needs and what works well for them<br>• Lessening student sense of frustration because they can now articulate problems they are experiencing<br>• Reflecting back in order to move forward<br>• Staff answering the questions that need to be asked – metacognition<br>• Brainstorming new approaches and how to capture student interest<br>• Scope and sequencing of learning done together<br>• Toing and froing<br>• Showing respect for different types of learners<br>• Professional conversations are engaging and promote collective commitment<br>• Teachers going above and beyond – long hours total commitment<br>• Dedication and commitment<br>• No sense of real frustration<br>• Leadership keeping us focussed on kids<br>• Prioritising based on student need<br>• Willing to look at change and work towards improvement for students<br>• Parents love having a voice<br>• Same principle different ways of developing it in classrooms - different ways same intent<br>• Before coming to school had no prior knowledge of IDEAS<br>• Simplicity of KITES concept makes it easy to explain<br>• Everyone on board<br>• Collective enthusiasm for what school stands for<br>• Passionate leadership |

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| • Children sharing with parents because of their connection with it<br>• Kites awards emphasise our values and beliefs<br>• Educating parents with the same language to gain their understanding and support<br>• Working with partners to address pedagogical concerns<br>• Referring to the visuals keeps us focussed and centred – aligned<br>• Visuals indicate to visitors who and what we are<br>• Visuals connect people to what they are hearing in the school<br>• Establishing student learning teams<br>• Differing work station arrangements<br>• Changing learning teams – promoting working with others no matter who they are<br>• Mixed ability groupings to promote responsibility for own and others learning<br>• Metaphors link meaning | • Teaching for thirty years – I found it refreshing – need that<br>• Referencing metacognition again<br>• Sitting back and processing information<br>• Reflection space is a part of me (internal space)<br>• Self learning comes from linking – chain in my head<br>• Teaching students to reflect, metacognition, give back, share ideas<br>• Students taking responsibility for their own learning<br>• Innovation with student presentations<br>• Students considering colours, shapes etc to represent meaning<br>• Students having to articulate the choices they made<br>• Sharing between students creates ownership and identity (as with teachers)<br>• Changing classroom structures evolving out of changing practice<br>• Skilling students with people skills |

# Appendix D: 'Mental stereo imaging' from Forrester Hill data

Throughout analysis of the transcripts 'mental stereo imaging' had been highlighted. These highlighted sections were brought together under themes and later tabled in chronologcal order in order to ascertain changes that occurred within the meanings of the 'mental stereo imaging' used.

**Part A: Forrester Hill 'mental stereoimagings in themes**

**Past: All 'mental stereo imaging' references from staff at the school over the long term has negative overtones – there is a sense that the staff were lost, there was little energy, collegiality, or common understanding of what to do.**

Sense of being lost:
- lost at sea (P)
- not really getting anywhere (T)
- someone who was lost (P)
- lost direction (TL)

No common understandings:
- we didn't seem to know how to get somewhere (T)
- no real sense of direction (TL)

Lack of spark or energy to make things better:
- add-ons and overload sapping energy (TL)
- stayed in my hole (T)
- it was enough just to survive one day at a time (T)

Little collegiality:
- did their own thing (T)
- we did not talk at a deep level (T)
- power groups (TL)
- retreating to a world of blame (TL)

**Transition: A different type of 'mental stereo imaging' reference comes into play. There is a sense of being re-energised, challenged and presented with possibilities through the building of strong relationships and the creation of quality communication channels.**

Re-energising practice:
- ignited a passion (T)
- reignite the dialogue (P)
- a powerful catalyst (TL)

Building relationships:
- dealing with personalities on the far end of the spectrum (TL)
- understanding 'in-the-grip' behaviours (TL)
- struggling with finding a niche (NT)
- hard to break into but it wasn't (NT)

A catalyst creating possibilities:
- (IDEAS) a powerful catalyst (TL)
- dreaming (T)

Taking on challenges:
- Out of our comfort zone (T)
- supporting staff to grow (P)
- big learning curve (T)

Developing communication channels:
- A clearer internal language system (TL)
- building understandings (NT)

**Present: Metaphors abound when speaking about what currently occurs within the school. The Principal in particular weaves verbal picture threads throughout her dialogue. The multiple threads woven by different speakers fall into categories which at times overlap but which can be roughly grouped as follows:**

Elements of common language used:
- PODS (all)
- Growing together (all)
- Values (all)
- the Vision (all)
- Learning Forever (all)
- Living the language (all)
- The language…is very positive – full of possibilities (NT)

Making connections:
- seeking deeper understanding (P)
- made the connections (P)
- it's all there bar the kitchen sink (T)
- the big picture things (NT)
- on the same page (T)
- it all hangs together (T) (NT)

Building teacher capacity:
- teaching stronger (P)
- centred on learning (T)
- allows them to be not overloaded (P)
- basic groundwork (T)
- pushing them to reach their potential (P)

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- teachers feel so empowered (NT)
- a real feeling of I can (NT)

Embracing change:
- embrace what needs to be done (P)
- work their way through PJ)
- layering change (P)
- embrace the opportunities (P, TL, T)
- we are not reinventing the wheel every time (T)

A learning community:
- centred on learning (T, TL)
- targeting needs (T, NT, TL)
- working as one team (NT, T, TL, P)
- we are led to give and to learn (NT)

Clear professional understandings
- clear boundaries (T)
- roles and responsibilities (T)
- conversations that are different and powerful (P)
- go the extra mile (P)
- allow their craft to flourish (P)

Students needs and capabilities lead direction for learning
- enriching children's lives (P)
- you can't be an imposter – kids will pick up on that (P)
- kids are the future
- we can cater for individual children (T)
- targeting needs (T)

The sense of being part of a family with ups and downs but based on strong relationships
- live and breathe the feeling of family (all)
- Forrester Hill family (all)
- rebel against the family restrictions (P)
- feels connected like a family (P)

A sense of place and space:
- build a boundaried space (P)
- finding a niche so quickly (NT)
- a place for me (NT)
- my own place (NT)

A strong clear sense of direction and being on a journey
- real direction (NT) (TL)
- where the school is going (NT)
- on a journey (all)
- don't lose sight of what is important (P)

- we are going there together (NT)
- we are very much all on that train (NT)
- going back before moving forward (T)

The parallel leadership team gives the school strength and life
- the leadership team is the arteries, the life blood (P)
- the conduit for change (P)
- members of a team (P)
- embrace the opportunities (P)

Simplifying the messages and the actions to be taken
- take the core (P)
- package of stuff (P)
- work their way through slowly (P)
- layering change (P)
- allowing them to not be overloaded P)

Inclusive practices must be consciously constructed
- bridge the gap (NT)
- if you sit outside you are really alone (NT)
- I don't have to sacrifice who I am (NT)
- not always win-win but how we can work together (T)

**Part B - Forrester Hill 'mental stereoimagings tabled in chronological order**

| Principal Sunny fields | Teacher Leader | New Teacher |
|---|---|---|
| **Past:** (P) is a teaching principal speaks of unhappy relationship with school community. <br>• The us and them scenario <br>• Just crucified me <br>• Always fighting <br>**Transition:** <br>• No longer us and them <br>• Slowly coming together <br>• One of my struggles <br>• Growing pains <br>**Present:** <br>• Consistent messages <br>• Our goals <br>• Build that <br>• Active learning <br>• Fine tuned <br>• Growing those things <br>• Student needs in the centre <br>• Expectations underpinning <br>• Exploring how expectations are to be reached <br>• In depth conversations <br>• Metaphor vision – sort of picture <br>• My goals <br>• Establish a baseline <br>• Leave us for dead (student ability) <br>• Powerful (functional grammar) <br>• Teamwork <br>• Smooth running <br>• Under the umbrella of creativity <br>• The big winner was technology <br>• Making from scratch <br>• In that department <br>• We really embrace that | **Past:** (TL) agrees with Principal's view of the past <br><br>**Transition:** <br><br><br><br>**Present:** <br>• Progress – a journey <br>• Travelled – a journey <br>• Way forward – a journey <br>• Set up for the new year <br>• Building <br>• To hang things on <br>• Focussed on what we want <br>• We know where we're heading <br>• Heading in the same direction <br>• On the war path (looking for books) <br>• evolving <br>• Building up feelings about reading <br>• Drag them kicking and screaming <br>• Fully in the loop <br>• Try another road <br>• Little glimmer of positivity <br>• Looking for things <br>• Focussing on <br>• Took it and ran with it <br>• She always ties in <br>• Along the same lines | **Past:** (NT) returned to school after 2 year absence – she said it was like going to a new school <br>• Directionless <br><br>**Transition:** <br>• Safe to come back <br>• A place to feel safe and supported <br><br><br><br>**Present:** <br>• Filtering <br>• Spins back around <br>• Viewed through the same lens (school essence) <br>• A lot more direction <br>• Connecting outside their own little worlds <br>• Preps begging for it (reading) <br>• Massive turn around <br>• Key parents in key roles <br>• P&C space <br>• The P&C no longer stops immediately to say no <br>• Changes in their approach <br>• Reflected in the fact that they understand <br>• Get my head around new ideas <br>• Putting in more time <br>• Reflecting on |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Leadership emerging<br>• Reflecting the vision or values<br>• Flows out of what was there<br>• Captures it better<br>• Capture who we are to show others<br>• A Sunny Fields story<br>• Looking forward<br>• Being generated<br>• Bouncing ideas<br>• Small little circle<br>• Checked in with each other<br>• Extends to our aides<br>• Need to investigate<br>• Working in the same arena<br>• Get the message across<br>• Fired up my imagination<br>• Stepping outside his comfort zone<br>• Tinkering in your classroom | • Building that in<br>• Working together<br>• Bouncing off<br>• Culture shock<br>• Not feeling threatened | |

# Appendix E: Example of collated processes from Sunny Fields

| Principal Processes in table form Sunny Fields | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acknowledging others talents/expertise<br>Active learningx2<br>Adaptingx3<br>Aligningx2<br>Allowing<br>Allowing voice<br>Appealing<br>Associating with<br>Being flexible<br>Being generated<br>Being positive<br>Bouncing offx2<br>Bringing to life<br>Capturing<br>Celebrating others learning<br>Centring<br>Challengingx2<br>Checking in<br>Coming back<br>Coming together<br>Communicating<br>Comparing<br>Confirming<br>Conversingx3<br>Conversing positively<br>Coordinating<br>Creatingx3<br>Creating | Creating website<br>Crucifying<br>Culturing<br>Developing<br>Deciding<br>Deeply conversing<br>Designing<br>Developing<br>Displaying<br>Doing better<br>Elaborating<br>Embracing new ideas<br>Enablingx2<br>Engaging<br>Establishing parameters<br>Evaluating<br>Expecting<br>Expert teaching<br>Extending leadership<br>Extending to others<br>Feeling<br>Feeling comfortable<br>Fighting (previously)<br>Fine-tuning<br>Firing up<br>Fitting around priorities<br>Flowing out<br>Focussingx2<br>Gradually emerging | Growing pains<br>Having the language<br>Heading<br>Hearing student voice<br>Improvingx2<br>Including<br>Inquiry learning<br>Incorporating<br>Increasing knowledge<br>Individualising<br>Initiating<br>Inviting<br>Involving<br>Involving everyonex2<br>Knowing the way<br>Leadership skilling<br>Leading<br>Leading to<br>Letting leadership emerge<br>Linking with vision<br>Linking back<br>Looking forward<br>Meshing<br>Messaging<br>Modifying<br>Moving a long way | Moving forward<br>Needing the story<br>Needing partner<br>Offering opportunities<br>Performing<br>Planning<br>Preparing<br>Preparing to change<br>Problem solvingx3<br>Promoting independence<br>Pushing each other<br>Questioningx2<br>Raising expectations<br>Rating<br>Realising<br>Reasoning<br>Re-confirming<br>Recording<br>Redesigning<br>Re-doing<br>Reflectingx3<br>Relating<br>Relating to vision<br>Reminding<br>Taking it slow | Revisiting x2<br>Risk takingx2<br>Sampling views<br>Scaffoldingx2<br>Self-directing<br>Social skilling<br>Stepping back<br>Struggling<br>Suggesting<br>Supporting each other<br>Surveying<br>Sustainingx2<br>Teaching<br>Taking care<br>Talkingx2<br>Talking about our language<br>Teachingx2<br>Tinkering<br>Tracking<br>Trusting<br>Underpinning<br>Using common language<br>Valuing input<br>Wanting<br>Wanting voice<br>Whole school planning<br>Working to improve<br>Working togetherx3 |

# Appendix F: Forrester Hill Songs

**The Values SONG**

Respect, responsibility, dignity and worth
Cooperation and confidence our values will shine
forth
Participation and honest for these we will all strive
Let's make our school the best we can
as well all learn for life.



**The Forrester Hill Vision Song**

At Forrester Hill school together we grow
Reaping rewards from the seeds we sow
Learning Forever the values we need
Building on our strengthes so each can succeed

Chorus

*Growing together -we're learning forever*

*Hearts and minds reaching for the best*

*Forrester Hill Families don't rest*

Roots holding strong in values soil
Hand in hand through fun and toil
Ebracing life arms like branches upthrust
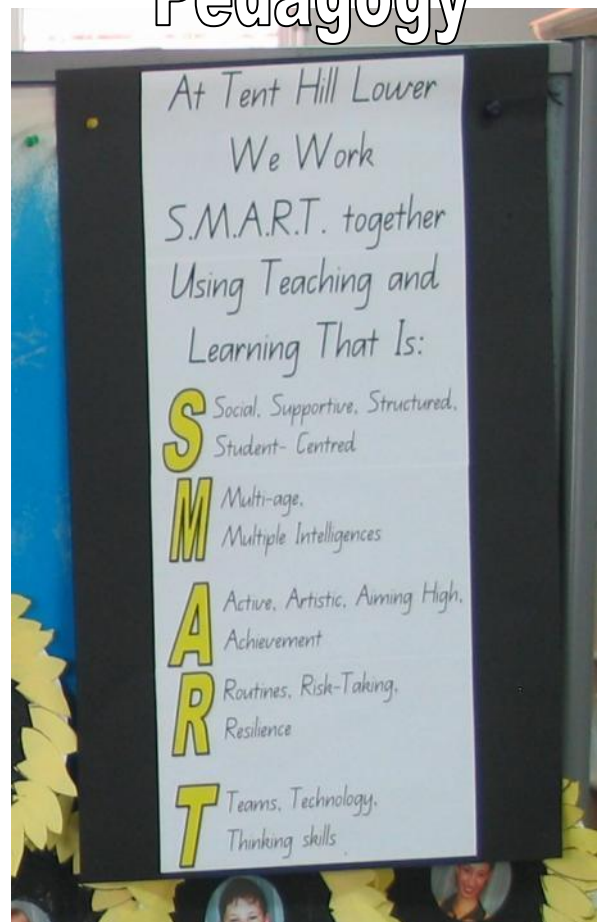Growing flowers & seeds of knowledge & trust.

# Appendix G: The things that matter at Sunny Fields

**The Vision**

Growing Beautiful Futures...

IN THE VALLEY OF OPPORTUNITIES

**Growing Smarter**

**Schoolwide Pedagogy**

At Tent Hill Lower We Work S.M.A.R.T. together Using Teaching and Learning That Is:

**S** Social, Supportive, Structured, Student-Centred

**M** Multi-age, Multiple Intelligences

**A** Active, Artistic, Aiming High, Achievement

**R** Routines, Risk-Taking, Resilience

**T** Teams, Technology, Thinking skills

**Hands on active learning**
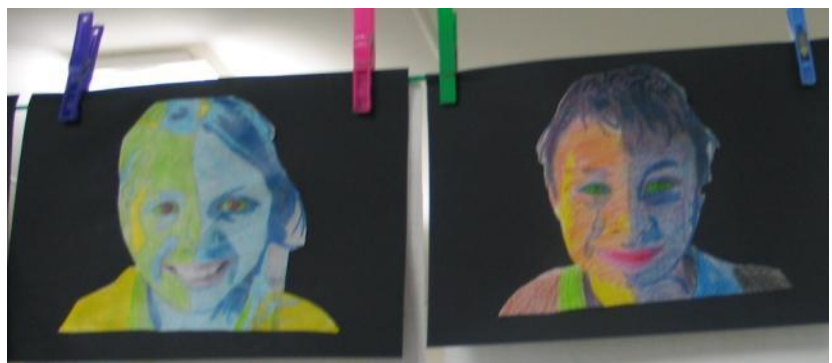
# Appendix H: The things that matter at Forrester Hill



## The Schoolwide Pedagogy

**GROWING TOGETHER (Trunk) -**

**Relationship building**
- Relationship building and celebration of difference is the foundation upon which effective learning occurs across the whole school community.

**Values based practice**
- Reinforcing a strong values education program through the explicit teaching and modelling of our community developed values.

**Building on prior knowledge**
- Engage students through explicit links to their prior knowledge including community, local personal, and cultural experiences.

**LEARNING FOREVER (PODS, Flowers & Leaves) -**

**Deep Understanding**
- Students show deep understanding by connecting concepts and knowledge to solve problems, construct explanations and draw conclusions within real life situations.

**Quality Communication**
- Quality interaction in classrooms occurs through substantive conversations and metalanguage focussed instruction.

**Futures Focus**
- Equipping individuals with skills, knowledge and strategies to be prepared for a future of change.

**SUPPORTING EACH OTHER (Roots) –**

**Individuality**
- Acknowledge individuals accounting for their needs and abilities.

**Risk Takers**
- Encouraging risk taking through supporting sequential learning experiences.

**Personal Growth**
- Build on experiences self reflection, negotiated expectations, clear outcomes and assessment tasks directly linked to learning activities.
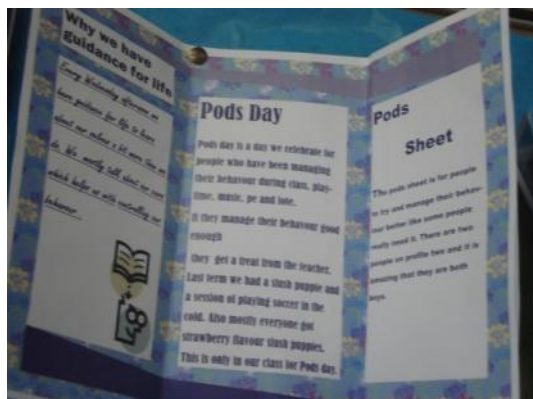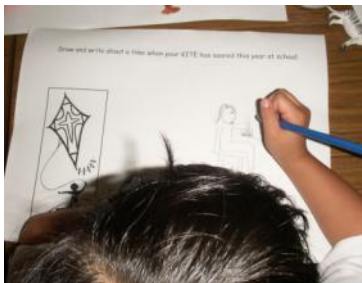
# Appendix I: The things that matter at St. Monica's

**From this hill we will soar**

**Faith**

**Schoolwide Pedagogy**

Knowledge - Acquisition and use of new skills and information developed from previous understandings and of relevance to the learner.

Innovation - A passionate engagement with learning that explores new ways to make new meaning.

Taking Risks - Our shared understanding of *taking risks* is that we can engage in the learning process knowing that we learn from our experiences. We are actively involved in decision making and developing our problem solving strategies.

Empowerment - Together we soar with empowerment. Our shared understanding of empowerment is being proactive in the decision making process to take ownership of our learning

Success - we believe that success is striving to reach your potential and soaring beyond previous accomplishments.

# Appendix J: The pedagogical connection to a CCLUE

**The evolution of a contextuallycreated language of understanding and engagement – CCLUE – a process of continual double-loop pedagogical learning**

**words related to pedagogy WRTP**

**Pedagogy is reflected upon using CCLUE**

**Reflection**

**words related to pedagogy WRTP**

**Engagement is transformed into pedagogical action**

**Reflection**

**words related to pedagogy WRTP**

**Contextually-created understandings fosters engagement**

**words related to pedagogy WRTP**

**Contextually created meaning creates contextually created understanding**

**CCLUE**

**Reflection**

**revitalisation process**

**words related to pedagogy WRTP**

**Word sparcity**

**words related to pedagogy WRTP**

**Bank with process meaning**

**words related to pedagogy WRTP**

**Bank with contextually created meaning**

# Appendix K: Themes from multifaceted texts 2004-2010 at Forrester Hill

The multifaceted texts from Forrester Hill are extensive and span a period of 8 years of progress commencing in 2003 when the IDEAS process was first commenced within the school. A number of the threads running through the multiliterate texts that have been preserved as part of the IDEAS journey relate to fundamental qualities relating to what the school culture has become. It is interesting to pinpoint certain chronological milestones where new understandings were made concrete by the creation of powerful artefacts and 'ways of doing things'. I have attempted to capture these milestones within the following dot points and note their recurring presence in the years to come as indicated by a number and a tick. (Note: The digit 4 refers to 2004; the digit 5 refers to 2005 etcetera):

**2003:** The only records from the first year of the IDEAS journey were sparse and related to the mechanics of the process itself including how meetings were to be organised, when they would be held, who would be leading the process and details of the IDEAS protocols or principles of practice that the leadership team would be attempting to embed in school life. Progress was slow and the biggest step forward in the journey towards school revitalisation was the slow healing of rifts and the creation of stronger relationships between the many factions present within the school at that stage of commencement.

- Staff tackle new challenges 4✓ 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

**2004:** The following list collates significant words apparent in meeting notes and pictures of brainstorming records. These should be expected to reappear in what follows as they were integral to what teachers and parents stated as being important at Forrester Hill:

- Multiliteracies 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Improving Pedagogy 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Questioning practice 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Unpacking the vision 5✓6✓(turned into unpacking the schoolwide pedagogical principles)
- Growing and learning 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Consistency of classroom practice 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Parent voice 5 ✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Celebration 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Tree metaphor 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓
- Collective commitment 5✓6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

(As these reappear in following year summaries they shall be ticked to indicate their presence.)

**2005:** As the summaries unfold and become connected together other significant words and phrases appear:

- Authoritative pedagogies underpinning understandings and practice 6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Embedding new understandings 6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Higher order thinking and metacognition 6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Trialling different ways of working 6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Making the links for students – vision to values and behaviours 6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Developing and recording understandings 6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Learning to know self and others (2006 explicitly stated for students not teachers) 6✓7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Student views were sort and student voice started to be heard7✓8✓9✓10✓

<div align="center">**Plus**</div>

**2006:** This was the first year that the school had no formal connection with external IDEAS support personnel. It was also the year that saw a complete change of administration staff. The previous deputy retired, the registrar (also a key IDEAS School Management Team (ISMT) member) left for a position in District Office and the principal left due to personal reasons. In the six months prior to the Principal going on extended sick leave the school had reached an uncertain period as staff were uncomfortable with some of the decisions being made. The parallel leadership team was the group that held things together.  An Acting-Principal was appointed who was from another IDEAS school nearby. With strong leadership support again in place significant development occurred throughout the remainder of the year.

Key characteristics of what was happened through 2006:

- Technology being used in authentic ways 7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Celebration days an important means of conveying messages  7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Visual and musical displays reinforce vision and values 7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Students of all ages and stages can relate to vision and values songs 7✓8✓

- Parallel leadership team conveying Big Picture understandings 7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Creative use of time and personnel coming to the fore 7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Induction program for new families comes into being (still present in 7,8,9,10)

- The questions of the RBF being used for whole school reflection, planning and alignment 7✓8✓9✓10✓

- By necessity parallel leadership team involved in systemic documentation (this continues although necessity is no longer driving the reason why 7✓8✓9✓10✓)

- Social skills program (Guidance for Life Program) comes into being and receives a great deal of support 7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Sharing of school's IDEAS journey with others 7✓8✓9✓10✓

- Staff commenced reflection and planning using the Research Based Framework as the tool to facilitate these discussions 7X8✓9✓10✓

**Plus**

**2007**: Leadership remains uncertain but fortunately the Acting-Principal is able to remain in this role. One key facilitator leaves the school:

- The metaphor of the tree is strongly linked to behaviour expectations (named PODS) 8✓9✓10✓

- Comparison of the data obtained from the second DI, conducted at the end of 2006, against the first DI, conducted in 2003, was cause for whole school celebration of the obvious distance travelled in terms of relationships, leadership and learning

- Student leadership and student voice come to the fore - students involved in analysing data pertaining to them, students work with RBF 8✓9✓10✓

- Student leadership team present their understandings of the data to teachers and parents 8✓9X10✓

- Students develop beginning school packs and mentoring for new students (student induction) 8✓9X10✓

- Student friendly version of SWP picture developed (this image becomes the one most frequently seen 8✓9✓10✓)

- P&C support student leadership team initiatives 8✓9✓10✓

- Principal building leadership capacity in others 8✓9X10✓

- SWP revisited and made more explicit 8X9✓(simplified in 2010)

- Guidance for Life Program becomes the Vision Program as it is the means of actioning the vision on a whole school basis 8✓9✓10✓

- Wider community involvement grows – woodworking, chess 8✓(other community facilitated activities are continually being added 9✓10✓)

**Plus**

**2008:** Key remaining facilitator takes on research scholarship and is only present in school one day a week. Action continues but records reduce:

- Special needs students think of the PODS as part of their own identity

- The website is redone to reflect the school's unique identity 9✓

- The Vision Program is reviewed and embedded with Essential Learnings

- Student leadership team use the research based framework to reflect on the past year and plan for the new year 9✓10✓

**Plus**

**2009:** Other teacher leader leaders come to the fore and fill the gap left by the key facilitator's detour into the academic world:

- Teacher leadership capacity continues to grow primarily in the areas of curriculum leadership and contributions to systemic initiatives and planning 10✓

- Parent appreciation of the website is strong (with two new families coming to the school based on what they saw and read) 10✓

- Professional development targets strongly identified pedagogical needs – IT pedagogy, literacy comprehension, science pedagogy 10✓

- Teacher professionalism and commitment to own learning continues to grow 10✓

- Further unfolding of SWP understandings results in BUDS planning strategies

- The Vision and values songs are no longer being sung on parade

- New students do not easily remember the words of the vision or the values 10✓

- Student leaders develop a student beginner pack consisting of a ruler displaying the values and a pencil with the words of the vision inscribed on it 10✓

- Students plan actions related to service pedagogy – planning ways to contribute to their local community 10✓

**Plus**

**2010 to the end of Term 1:** After being a part of the fabric of Forestville State School I left the school at the end of Term 1 in order to complete this research and to take on the role of a lecturer in Curriculum and Pedagogy:

- Using the Research Based Framework as their reflection point students plan new ways of celebrating peer contributions

- Student leadership team identify that they are responsible for their own learning and begin development of a metacognitive learning framework.

- An Induction CD consisting of school administrative and curriculum essentials is created. The CD also documents the school's IDEAS journey, its Vision Program, the PODS expectations and Behaviour Management Plan as well as providing resource banks such as recordings of past professional conversations and pedagogical sharing sessions.

- School celebrations of Education Week are shared throughout an entire week of community activities

- The results of the first ever audit of school improvement plans and an in depth curriculum review produce satisfying results and school leaders and systemic personnel visit the school to see the Forestville staff in action
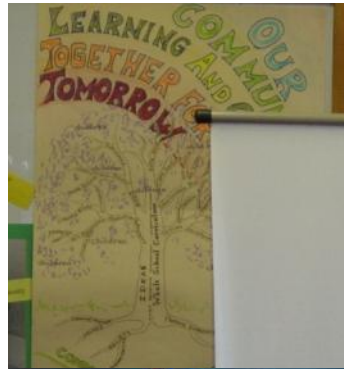
# Appendix L: Evolution of Imagery at Forrester Hill
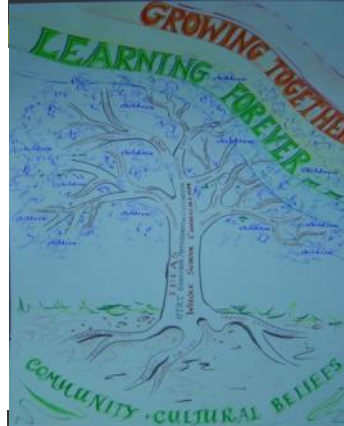
Parent drawings of image



July 2004

Draft Vision wording with first version of tree image



Dec 2004

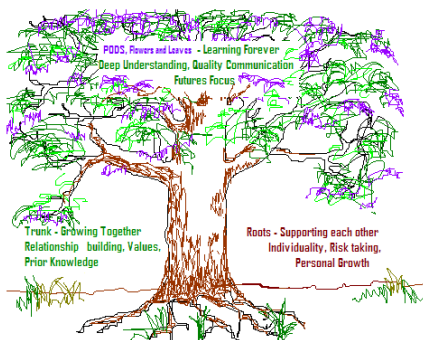Final draft of vision wording with old tree image



March 2005

Final draft of vision wording With new Jacaranda image linked to values as the seeds



**July 2005**

First version of SWP tree



Dec 2006

**June 2007**

Student version of SWP



Still current

# Appendix M: Transcript example from St. Monica's

*Sydney – St. Monica's  Prinicipal interview conducted 25/11/09 – 11/4 hour interview*

> *This is the transcript from the recorded interview with the Principal from St. Monica's. Some sections have been highlighted and comments made after the first initial reading. It was from transcripts such as these that the data were interpreted and then reduced into themes.Names have been removed. Anything written in bold are my words and the remainder are the principal's oral responses.*

**How would you describe  the current dialogue that happens in staff meetings and round lunch tables etc. Has it changed at all over the last few years?**

Staff here have **traditionally** been **people** who **speak nicely and well to one another. I think sometimes when people think about professional dialogue –well - Dave talks about the country club aspect** of it**.**

Now the journey - we've moved a long way now! **Now it's really teachers getting to a higher level** and I think that I can see now through conversations with teachers that we're far more focussed. **There's a far greater pedagogical focus when talking to one another and the thing that really inspires me** - particularly this year in my role **- is they will come** to me **and have conversations about things that are not working for them,** the things that they're not happy with. For example, we had stage 2 this year - now huge numbers in stage 2, 32+ students, a lot of very high needs students in those classes and the teachers came to me at the end of term 1 and said, **"Donna, the large increase in numbers of children this year, which we haven't had in the past, we aren't making the sort of ground in terms of student outcome that we would like to"** - now I thought that was significant. **It's not often that somebody knocks on the principal's door and says we don't think things are working for us as well as they should be. I think that that's definitely attributable to the professional dialogue in this school and trust and it's also about leadership.** So I think those three things are working here. And I think that's a clear example of it. It really is significant - this would not have happened at the beginning of our IDEAS journey.

**How long have you been here?**

This is my third year. Two years as Assistant Principal and now Principal.

**IDEAS sort of started basically when you**…

I introduced IDEAS. When I applied for this position they were looking for somebody to begin the IDEAS process. I had had a year at my previous school - the first year of the process. The principal said to me "Debbie, I would like you to introduce the idea to the staff". I didn't even know the staff so it was a bit daunting.  She sort of said to me "well can you know tell me the right people to be part of the ICT. "

So I thought oh I've got to do this really well. This is important. I spoke to them and talked to them and tried to sell it because I think it's about selling it - selling the notion. I said to them if you could have something working in your school that helped you (and I had all

these different jobs on the board, boys ed., reporting, and all sorts of things)… if I could give you something that would pull that all together for you and give you a way to do that - give you the time to do it, a way to communicate to one another … and I had a big umbrella over the top of all those things. Look this is what it will entail…it's a whole staff focus, but there is an ISMT that gather together and develop a journey. Everybody put their hand up.  So we had the whole staff apply for these positions. And we just shook our heads and said oh my gosh how does this happen?

So we had at the beginning a main focus team of five people and a supporting team which was nearly the whole staff. It worked really, really well. We had people coming in and out of meetings listening. They were curious and wanting to know what's happening. And that worked really well as well.

00:04:58

***Were there parents involved fairly early on or mainly the teachers?***

It was mainly the teachers at the beginning but at the end of the first year we decided that perhaps it was time to bring a couple of parents on board. We did target a couple of parents in the community but they seemed a little bit reticent, a little bit shy, but we had one parent particularly who took it on board, came to our meetings, started working with us.  Through developing the vision -  whatever we would do with staff she would be involved in - then she would take it to the parents and do the same session there and that worked really well. But it was really just the one parent.

***And has parent involvement become greater?***

Huge. Um one of the things that came out of the diagnostic inventory and was part of our school report initially was that parents felt that they wanted a greater say in the decision-making of the school . So this year we really had that in mind. We heard parents saying that, look we're really great at fundraising and all those sorts of things in the school, we support you but we really want to know what education our children are getting. We want to know how you come to make policy decisions etc - so we started up a class parent group.

The class parent group was a bit of a challenge really. It had a history here of falling apart, for different reasons. And we thought well let's resurrect that because that's a good connection. I actually had to ring parents and invite them because we didn't have anyone put their hands up, so that was interesting. So I personally invited them and we had a great range of young, new parents, and older parents because we had some reservations about some older parents in the community -  being a little bit negative about things. I thought okay let's pull you back in a bit, change that because you seem to be communicating the things we don't want in the community so we pulled them back by bringing new parents in. We started these plus parent meetings. We have two or three a term. Sue and I work together with the parent sand we have developed our mission vision statement and our strategic management or strategic improvement plan.