

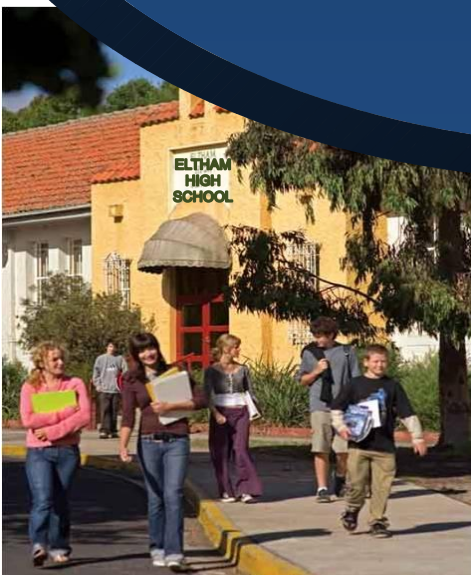


Learning Together to Build a Bright Future

*A Research Report on the  
Implementation of the IDEAS Project  
in Victoria, 2004-8*

by  
Associate Professor Dorothy Andrews  
and the USQ-LRI Research Team

September, 2009



Vision: Be Brave, Lead, Succeed



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Research Team.....	1
Executive Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	9
Background to the Research .....	9
1.1 Overview .....	9
1.2 Initiation of the IDEAS Project in Victoria .....	10
1.3 Contractual developments.....	12
1.4 Program funding .....	12
1.5 Program management .....	14
1.6 Initiation of the research.....	14
1.7 Chapter summary.....	15
Chapter 2.....	16
Delivery of the IDEAS Project in Victoria, November 2004-2008 .....	16
2.1 Key components of the IDEAS Project. ....	16
2.2 The international research context of the IDEAS Project .....	22
2.3 Implementation strategies and dynamics of IDEAS in Victoria, 2004-8 .....	32
2.4 IDEAS-Victoria cohort one management .....	35
2.5 Chapter summary.....	35
Chapter 3.....	36
Research Design and Methodology .....	36
3.1 The research problem and research questions .....	36
3.2 The research sample .....	37
3.3 The database for the research .....	40
3.4 The evolutionary nature of the research approach .....	41
3.5 Timeframe for the research .....	48
3.6 Chapter summary.....	49
Chapter 4.....	50
The Research Data Base and Research Findings.....	50
4.1 The empirical database .....	50
4.2 The descriptive database .....	62
4.3 Chapter summary.....	126
Chapter 5.....	127
Findings of the Research.....	127

5.1 Research question one:.....	128
5.2 Research question two:.....	133
5.3 Research question three: .....	138
5.4 Research question four: .....	148
5.5 Research question five:.....	168
5.6 Research question six:.....	175
5.7 Implications for school development research.....	177
5.8 Implications for the Victorian Department of Education.....	179
5.9 Final word.....	181
References .....	182

## FIGURES

FIGURE 5.1: THE DYNAMICS OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL CAPACITY BUILDING (FIGURE 5.1 IN REPORT) .....	6
FIGURE 1: CREATING AND SUSTAINING SCHOOL SUCCESS THROUGH PARALLEL LEADERSHIP .....	8
FIGURE 4.1: A GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF STAFF OPINION SURVEY DATA FOR ALL VICTORIAN SCHOOLS, 2004-2008 .....	53
FIGURE 4.2A: A GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF STAFF OPINION SURVEY DATA FOR ALL VICTORIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS, 2004-2008 .....	54
FIGURE 4.2B: A GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF STAFF OPINION SURVEY DATA FOR ALL VICTORIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, 2004-2008 .....	54
FIGURE 5.1: THE DYNAMICS OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL CAPACITY BUILDING .....	150

## TABLES

TABLE 1.1: PARTICIPATING IDEAS-VICTORIA SCHOOLS, 2004-6, AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL.....	13
TABLE 3.1: OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE SCHOOLS - LOCATIONS AND DESIGNATIONS.....	37
TABLE 3.2: PHASE OF THE <i>ideas</i> PROCESS REACHED BY NOVEMBER, 2006.....	38
TABLE 3.3: SOME KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CASE STUDY SCHOOLS .....	39
TABLE 3.4: A SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH DATABASE .....	40
TABLE 4.1: SUMMARY OVERVIEW OF IDEAS PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION IN THE RESEARCH COHORT, 2004-8.	51
TABLE 4.2: SOS CATEGORIES AND PERCENTAGE CHANGES FOR ALL VICTORIAN SCHOOLS, 2004-8 .....	53
TABLE 4.3: COMPARISON OF STAFF OPINION SURVEY RESULTS FOR IDEAS COHORT SCHOOLS AND STATE RESULTS, 2004-7-8.....	56
TABLE 4.4: COMPARISON OF STAFF OPINION SURVEY (SOS) RESULTS FOR CASE STUDY IDEAS SCHOOLS, 2004-8 .....	59
TABLE 4.5: CASE STUDY SCHOOLS' IMPROVEMENTS IN SAS DATA FROM 2006 TO 2008 .....	60
TABLE 4.6: NON-CASE STUDY SCHOOLS' SAS PERFORMANCE, 2006 TO 2008 .....	61

TABLE 5.1: A SUMMARY OF IMPROVEMENTS IN SCHOOL OUTCOMES, 2004-8, IN THE CASE STUDY SCHOOLS .....	131
TABLE 5.2: SIX KEY IDEAS FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESSES OF THE VICTORIAN IDEAS SCHOOLS .....	133
TABLE 5.3: LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS APPARENT IN THE BELLBRIDGE CASE STUDY .....	142
TABLE 5.4: LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS APPARENT IN THE MEADOW FAIR NORTH CASE STUDY .....	142
TABLE 5.5: LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS APPARENT IN THE ELTHAM CASE STUDY .....	143
TABLE 5.6: LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS APPARENT IN THE KEALBA CASE STUDY .....	143
TABLE 5.7: LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS APPARENT IN THE LA TROBE CASE STUDY .....	144
TABLE 5.8: IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FOR THE IDEAS CONSTRUCT OF TEACHER LEADERSHIP .....	145
TABLE 5.9: IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FOR THE IDEAS CONSTRUCT OF METASTRATEGIC PRINCIPALSHIP .....	146
TABLE 5.10: IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FOR THE IDEAS CONSTRUCT OF PARALLEL LEADERSHIP .....	147
TABLE 5.11: THE SIX BASIC DYNAMICS OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL CAPACITY-BUILDING .....	150
TABLE 5.12: DOMINANT LEADERSHIP FORMS AND APPROACHES IN SCHOOL CAPACITY-BUILDING DYNAMICS .....	178

## DIAGRAMS

DIAGRAM 2.1: THE <i>ideas</i> PROCESS.....	17
DIAGRAM 2.2: THE RESEARCH-BASED FRAMEWORK .....	19
DIAGRAM 2.3: 3-D.P - THREE-DIMENSIONAL PEDAGOGY .....	20
DIAGRAM 2.4: LINKING PARALLEL LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESSFUL CAPACITY-BUILDING .....	21

## EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT 1: BELLBRIDGE'S VISION AND SWP.....	64
EXHIBIT 2: MEADOW FAIR NORTH'S VISION, VALUES AND SWP.....	76
EXHIBIT 3: ELTHAM'S PURPOSE STATEMENTS.....	93
EXHIBIT 4: KEALBA'S VISION, VALUES AND SWP .....	108
EXHIBIT 5: LA TROBE'S VISION, VALUES AND SWP .....	119

## The Research Team

**Research project leader:** Associate Professor Dorothy Andrews

**USQ-LRI research team leaders:**

Associate Professor Dorothy Andrews

Dr Joan Conway

Dr Jan D’Arcy

Dr Marian Lewis

Dr Allan Morgan

**Research team members:**

Ms Lindy Abawi

Ms Judy Boyle

Mr Mark Dawson

Dr Mary Keeffe

Mr Doug Jeanes

Associate Professor Shirley O’Neill

Ms Shauna Petersen

**Research statistical data analyst:**

Associate Professor Shirley O’Neill

**School-based research representatives:**

*Banksia-La Trobe Sec. College* Mr Glenn White (Principal) and Ms Judy Dunn

*Bellbridge Primary School* Mr Lance Frigo (Principal), Mr Simon McGlade and  
Ms Cheryl Graham

*Eltham High School* Mr Vincent Sicari (Principal), Ms Linda McLeod and  
Ms Amanda McTernan

*Kealba Secondary College* Ms Julie Williams (Principal), Mr Colin Leech and  
Mr Jim Dowie

*Meadow Fair North Primary School* Ms Anne Morton (Principal) and Ms Marnie Rodriguez

**Research design validator:** Professor Bill Mulford

**Research mentor and synthesiser:** Emeritus Professor Frank Crowther

## **Case study two synopsis – Meadow Fair North Primary School (MFN)**

(Prepared by Dorothy Andrews, Lindy Abawi and Shirley O'Neill)


### **1. School context**

Meadow Fair North Primary School is located in one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged communities in Australian urban areas (ABS Census Statistics, 2006) and in 2004 catered for 232 students from Prep to Year 6. The school serves a very multicultural community which has a large number of highly transient families. Families range from recently arrived immigrants and refugees with little to no English to students from families who have experienced generational unemployment. 80% of the families in the school are recipients of educational maintenance allowance. Staff turnover has been low with the majority of the 17 staff being in the school for some time. By 2004 enrolments at Meadow Fair North were on the decline due to changing demographics, uncertainty about the school's future and the closer proximity of other primary schools to the major secondary colleges in the area. Safety issues were a major concern for both staff and parents and a general air of negativity pervaded school operations. The new principal came to Meadow Fair North with a strong social justice focus and saw the IDEAS Project as a way to move the school forward which resonated with her own strong beliefs. In November 2004, MFN commenced IDEAS using funding from a Targeted School Improvement Program as well as an Innovations and Excellence Grant.

Soon after commencing the IDEAS project the school community learnt that Meadow Fair North would cease to exist as an independent campus in the 2009-2010 period. The school would be combined in 2009 with one other school and then in 2010 with two other schools on a new site. These four schools are within close proximity of each other and the amalgamation is part of the *Broadmeadows School Regeneration Project*. In order for this transition to occur opportunities have been provided for staff, school council members, school community members and students across the four schools to work and plan for their future together on an ongoing basis. The Cluster Educator (Years 5-6), Literacy Specialist (Years 3-4), and School Improvement Officer (Years P-2) who visit Meadow Fair regularly, work across all four schools as coaches facilitating and supporting teacher learning.

The Meadow Fair school community became determined to ‘Go out with a bang!’ This positive and empowering attitude, along with their commitment to the IDEAS process, has resulted in significant improvement within the school over the four year period from 2004 to 2008. As visitors to Meadow Fair enter the school today, they are presented with large visual representations of the school’s vision - *Learning Together To Build A Bright Future* - and schoolwide pedagogical principles (SWP) (Exhibit 2). These images have become a key talking point for families and visitors to the school. Visitors are embraced with an environment that exudes calmness and vitality. The student population has shown a significant increase in 2008. This positive, dynamic change within the school environment is supported by measureable evidence including improved staff morale, the strengthening of community connections, and the improvement in both social and academic student outcomes.

**EXHIBIT 2: MEADOW FAIR NORTH'S VISION, VALUES AND SWP**



Meadowfair North Primary School  
**Learning Together**  
**To Build A Bright Future**

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INCLUDE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆What do we know about these children?</li> <li>◆How does this embrace our diversity?</li> </ul>
COLLABORATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆How are we collectively making use of our individual strengths, knowledge and ideas?</li> <li>◆How does this experience enable us to learn from each other?</li> </ul>
CONNECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆How does this connect to real life?</li> <li>◆How does this connect to the future?</li> </ul>
BUILD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆How does this build on what the students already know?</li> <li>◆What supports and strategies will be used to aid new learning?</li> <li>◆How does this new learning encourage us to think in new ways?</li> </ul>
REFLECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆What opportunities have been provided for reflection?</li> <li>◆What have I learnt?</li> <li>◆How can I apply this learning?</li> <li>◆Where to from here?</li> </ul>



## 2. Timeline of IDEAS Project implementation activities and SOS outcomes

IDEAS Team Delivery	Year	IDEAS Implementation	SOS Trend
November/December Orientation February/March – Workshop & school visits – Diagnostic Inventory (DI)	2004- May 2005	Introduction of Staff to IDEAS presented by the Principal Diagnostic Inventory (DI) collected DI workshop Set up IDEAS School Management Team (ISMT) Protocols establish to build relationships	Small positive change -in most items except student attitude, behaviour, motivation
Cluster Meetings & Telephone Conference August Workshop – Envisioning Cluster Meetings & Telephone Conference November Forum – Leadership, Pedagogy Work February/March – Workshop on SWP	June 2005- May 2006	Existing values reviewed and clarified using professional conversations Values clarification -- use of language and making sure all know what ‘this means ...’ List shared with Students for discussion and feedback Completed a History Trail Began visioning – dreaming  Other factor: Staff learn that they will definitely be amalgamated with three other schools on a new site.	Small positive change except significant improvement in student behaviour.
Cluster Meetings & Telephone Conference August Workshop – SWP (Schoolwide Pedagogy) and Actioning Cluster Meetings & Telephone Conference November Forum – Actioning and	June 2006 – May 2007	Vision launched at the end of 2006 – celebration and high level of community involvement Start developing SWP – Personal Pedagogical (PP) reflections Exploring SWP principles – confusion-clarification of a way forward by USQ Student involvement in ‘good teaching’ feedback SWP developed – continued to refine by	Significant positive Change

Planning February - IST Training		using in planning, action and sharing Restructuring – bringing down wall  Other factor: Curriculum days with other schools in the amalgamation.	
	June 2007 - May 2008	Delegation from Western Australia and Singapore provide positive feedback SWP rewritten for students Ongoing development through application – literacy and planning strategies in 2008 for a 2009 focus on numeracy  Other factor: IDEAS Facilitator attends IDEAS Support Team (IST) training in Victoria by USQ IDEAS Team. This resulted in new thinking around the implementation of the MFN SWP.	Stable
2004-2008			Overall upward trend

### 3. Documented evidence of enhanced school outcomes, 2004-8.

**Generic statement:** The improvements in particular school outcomes that are reported in specific detail below should be interpreted in the context of the following Meadow Fair North comparisons with State means:

**Improvements in Student Attitudes to School, 2006-8**

<u>State (Primary) means</u>			<u>MFN means</u>		
2006	2008	Improvement	2006	2008	Improvement
79.52	82.21	2.69	78.36	87.87	9.51

*NOTE:* The Statewide SAS improvement (2.69) was significant at  $p = < 0.01$ . MFN's SAS improvement was more than three times the State improvement, in numerical terms.

**Improvements in Staff Opinions of School, 2004-8**

<u>State (Primary) means</u>			<u>MFN means</u>		
2004	2008	Improvement	2004	2008	Improvement
62.85	65.12	2.27	57.58	65.96	8.38

*NOTE:* The Statewide SOS improvement (2.27) was significant at  $p < 0.05$ . MFN's SOS improvement was more than three times the State improvement, in numerical terms.

**Specific statements:**

<b>Descriptions of specific improvements in MFN outcomes</b>	
Students	<p>Outcome 1: Improvements in literacy- Year 2 &amp; Preparatory Year (Prep)</p> <p>Year 2 data for reading achievement reached the state mean in 2007 after being below in 2006.</p> <p>The 2007 Prep cohort achieved greater reading accuracy at Level 5 than did the 2006 cohort.</p> <p>Source: <i>The 2007 Assessment Of Reading DEECD Report.</i></p>

	<p>Outcome 2: Improvements in literacy: Years 5&amp; 3</p> <p>Year 5: 2004 - 2007 trended upward in Reading, Spelling &amp; Writing. In 2007: Spelling results were notably positioned above like and state schools. More than 3% of Year 5 students were reading at Level 5 and the mean CSF was comparable with the VELS Score for that year. This occurred at a time when the % of ESL student increased from 39% -53%</p> <p>Year 3 upward trend in all areas (some minor fluctuations)</p> <p>Year 3-5 progression: Reading Levels improved from Years 3 to 5.</p> <p>Source: <i>AIM Data 2004-2007</i></p>
	<p>Outcome 3: <i>Student behaviour</i></p> <p>Student suspension data from 2006 to 2008 improved significantly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2006 -10 incidents of full suspension for 1 or 2 days 87 after school detentions</li> <li>▪ 2008 - 0 incidents of full suspension 12 after school detentions</li> </ul> <p>Source: <i>Annual School Report 2008</i></p>
	<p>Outcome 4: <i>Student well-being</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up from 1st quartile to 4th quartile, 2006-8</li> <li>• <i>Teaching &amp; Learning</i> - up from 1st Quartile to 4th</li> <li>• <i>Student relationships</i> – up from 2<sup>nd</sup> Quartile to 3<sup>rd</sup> bordering on 4<sup>th</sup> (These were comprehensively above state mean in 2007 &amp; 2008 after being below state mean in 2006).</li> <li>• <i>Classroom behaviour</i> was still a concern in 2007 and was below the state mean. However in 2008 this figure rose to well above the state mean</li> <li>• <i>Student connectedness to peers</i> was low in 2007 but rose to the border line of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quartile in 2008</li> </ul> <p>Source: <i>Student Attitudes to School Survey (SAS) 2006-2008</i></p>

<p>Staff</p>	<p>Outcome 5: Perceived improvement in <i>student engagement</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive contributors: 1. <i>Effective Discipline Policy</i>; 2. <i>Student Orientation</i>; 3. <i>Student Motivation</i>; 4. <i>Student Decision Making</i>; 5. <i>Learning Environment</i>; 6. <i>Student Misbehaviour</i>; &amp; 7. <i>Classroom Misbehaviour</i></li> <li>• Positive contributors 1-5 rose from below the state mean in 2005 to within or above the state mean in 2008</li> <li>• Positive contributor 6 fell from significantly above the state mean in 2005 to within the state mean in 2008</li> <li>• Positive contributor 7 fell from just under 40% which was significantly above the state mean to just below 20% which was close to the state mean but still above</li> </ul> <p>Source: <i>Staff Opinion Survey (SOS) 2005-2008</i></p>
	<p>Outcome 6: Perceived <i>teacher engagement and professionalism</i>:</p> <p><u>Positive contributors</u>: 1. <i>Teacher Engagement</i>; 2. <i>Role Clarity</i>; 3. <i>Goal Congruence</i> ; 4. <i>Individual Motivation</i>; 5. <i>School morale</i>; 6. <i>Individual work demands</i>; 7. <i>Professional Growth</i>; 8. <i>Appraisal and Recognition</i>; 9. <i>Levels of Distress(SOS Data)</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicators 1- 5 &amp; 7, 8 rose from well below state mean in 2005 to within or above state mean in 2007 and remained relatively stable with minor downward fluctuations only from 2007-2008 possibly due to uncertainty about the effects of the imminent merger.</li> <li>• Indicators 6 &amp; 9 fell from above to below or within state means with the exception of a slight rise in concern about classroom behaviour in 2008 – possible due to implementation of more student directed, flexible learning arrangements.</li> </ul> <p><u>Staff Absenteeism</u>: Improvement trend supported by sick leave data (<i>Annual School Report</i>).</p> <p>Source: <i>Staff Opinion Survey (SOS) 2005-2008 and Annual School Report 2008</i>.</p>

	<p>Outcome 7: Attendance data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher (non certificated sick leave) attendance data fell from above state mean in 2005 to below state mean in 2008</li> <li>• Non-teaching staff (non certificated sick leave) data fell from above state mean in 2005 to within the state mean in 2008</li> </ul> <p>Source: <i>Annual School Report 2008</i></p>
Parents	<p>Outcome 8: Parent satisfaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction moved from below to above state mean in the areas of student behaviour; stimulating learning; and school improvement from 2005 to 2008</li> </ul> <p>Source : <i>Parent Opinion Survey (POS) 2005- 2008</i></p>

**4. Perceptions of key processes that contributed to enhanced achievements, in the context of *ideas* phases.**

***initiating* phase**

**Teachers' views**

'Meadow Fair was targeted as a low achieving school. Numbers were dropping and there was a general air of despondency in the place.'

**Researchers' views**

The principal 'selected' IDEAS as an opportunity for the school community to 'revitalise'. IDEAS, she believed, matched her personal beliefs about leading schools (in challenging communities) towards revitalisation. She 'tapped' others on the shoulder (selecting the right people) to work with her in the process.

## ***discovering phase***

### **Teachers' views**

'Safety issues at the school were a major concern in 2003 & 2004, particularly in the playground. For nearly two years I just did not want to walk in from the car park. I would be terrified to walk in here as I did not know what the students might do.'

'Absenteeism was a problem and students and the parents did not hold learning in high regard. Results were poor and yet we (the teachers) were trying so hard to improve them.'

'This was possibly our first BIG STEP along the journey. As a staff we made a commitment to go out with a BANG not a whimper and to give our students every opportunity for a bright future.' (Not long after the Diagnostic Inventory (DI) was completed it was announced that MFN was to be part of the Broadmeadows Schools Regeneration Project. MFN would merge with three other schools and our school would, in effect, cease to exist within 4 to 5 years).

### **Researchers' views**

At the commencement of the IDEAS project Meadow Fair North staff believed themselves to be hardworking but discouraged by the fact that their input was not producing the outcomes for students that it should be. This sentiment was reflected in the staff views presented in the School DI Report, that is, 'The MFN staff indicated that the school lacked an inspirational vision, lack of community engagement and pride in the school and whilst they believed they were striving hard to meet the needs of all students through their teaching and learning programs, the effort was not reflected in the data'.

There was real fear connected with poor student behaviour and concern that strategies put in place to improve the situation were not working. Teachers felt lost and did not know where to turn for direction.

The student DI data provided considerable concern for the staff as it showed significant polarisation in the responses in most areas. Most students felt that they were not achieving as well as they should in literacy and numeracy and a group of students felt that they were not achieving in any of the Key Learning Areas. A number of students felt that none of their needs were being met within the school environment.

External support was provided at a systems level through the School-systems Coordinator, the Broadmeadows Cluster coordinator and the USQ IDEAS project team members, in particular the project officer attached to this cluster. The School-systems Coordinator provided overall coordination across the three clusters, while the Broadmeadows cluster coordinator and USQ team member(s) provided on ground expertise and support. The School-systems coordinator was influential in the early stages of the IDEAS program working with the school-based facilitator in designing and implementing IDEAS activities that engaged the whole staff.

### **envisioning phase**

#### **Teachers' views**

'There was 100% support in our community for our new Values and Vision. Our Vision (*Learning Together To Build A Bright Future*) Launch was held on a special family day where we celebrated 100 Days of Learning. It was a huge success and it provided an opportunity to build concrete bridges with the MFN parent community' (MFN Facilitator's notes).

'Through providing opportunities for parents to participate in learning themselves, through English and Parenting classes, a positive learning climate has been built at Meadow Fair North and the value placed on school and education by the adults has set a positive and empowering example for students contributing to greater student participation and less absenteeism.'

'Our Vision takes our kids beyond the local community. Not that there is anything wrong with them staying in Broadmeadows but now they know they have the



choice. Their families also believe there are other opportunities and by learning themselves set a good example for the kids. The kids get a buzz out of seeing parents at school learning – the only thing is they don't understand why the adults keep the doors shut.'

The process of development commenced with teachers sharing stories about their personal pedagogy. The school facilitator described this as the 'buy in for us – we began to realise that our personal pedagogy was recognised, valued and encouraged (which allowed) us to reflect in a non-threatening way'.

'The big thing is collective responsibility for kids. We can see where the learning is going. There is a conscious effort to work together and working from where the students are at means we're always changing.'

### **Researchers' views**

The adoption of a 'no blame policy' and 'collective responsibility' has resulted in the dismantling of both physical and attitudinal barriers. No blame has become embedded in dialogue and communication in the school. Teachers have become more confident, mutually share and constructively critique their practice in relation to the agreed upon pedagogical principles that underpin the school wide pedagogy. As a consequence there was no need to close doors and 'construct' walls to hide personal pedagogy. 'Collective responsibility' for all children's learning in the school defined by one teacher as 'It became evident that we all had a concern about all the students in the school, their welfare and academic achievement, not just those in our own class.'

Alignment of school practice and purpose based on the Vision and SWP created an image of the future for the school community based on a philosophy of social mobility and the richness of diversity. It was felt that parental involvement in the many parent focused programs on offer gave them a social presence that enabled them to feel more at ease with talking to teachers and their children about the importance of learning which has raised the profile of learning within the community

as a whole. Students could see their parent's willingness and enjoyment in learning and became more involved in school activities. A number of classes saw a significant drop in absenteeism rates.

### **actioning phase**

#### **Teachers' views**

'The staff are building individualised learning paths for students and the SWP enables us to reflect on what we are building and why we are building it.'

'If they (the kids) are not engaged it's about me – it's the curriculum I'm offering. What do I need to do? Is it the way I am introducing the concept or is there too big a step up – how will I change?'

'Once if I was out of my comfort zone it was "No way!" – through IDEAS we're more open to new ideas coming through and seek knowledge about what we don't know . . . we as a group have conversations about planning, conversations about curriculum and I/we as a person am in a better place to have these conversations. I'm more confident about what I know and don't know. I am aware of what we want the end product to be what students need skilling up in.'

'There has been a total rethink of the way we do everything – what we do and how and why we do it, what our outcomes are and how will they be measured – all equating to improving our students, our philosophy, and our performance – this has been confronting for all staff but over time everyone seems to be able to put their personal feelings out of the whole picture and feel comfortable with the process.'

'Once issues of pedagogy were shunned during staff lunch breaks or in before or after school chats, such conversations and debates are now often heard in the staffroom. There is lots of professional dialogue and chatter between teachers – stuff that visitors to our school often comment on – and all done in a constructive, no blame way. We have staff constantly looking at the "bigger picture" – the best

ways for students and the school, teams working and thinking together, new ideas embraced and accepted and everyone taking pride in all school achievements.'

'Our data academically is driving us too because we want to improve. All the data is shared through to us at staff meetings. We sit here and the PowerPoint goes up. Previously we were not shown data warts and all. Now we dissect it and take responsibility for it. Our kids' data is our responsibility!'

### **Researchers' views**

'Every child is every teacher's responsibility' has become a common phrase that is enacted by all staff. Therefore there is a whole-school approach and the development of a professional meta-language evidencing words and phrases related to newly acquired forms of knowledge.

One powerful way that the Meadow Fair school community appears to make connections to meaning is through the use of metaphor. Four forms of metaphor are at work to complement and strengthen action and direction within the school: verbal, visual, actional and structural.

The SWP is tightly linked to the school vision, values and good practice, which is modelled and supported throughout the school. The staff moved to working collaboratively as a team and have developed a greater professional pride and commitment to improving students' learning, trying new approaches, dialoguing about pedagogy, seeking parents' views, and wanting to work together to create a learning community.

Teachers have become more confident, mutually share and constructively critique their practice in relation to the agreed upon pedagogical principles that underpin the school wide pedagogy. As a consequence there was no need to close doors and 'construct' walls to hide personal pedagogy. 'Collective responsibility' for all children's learning in the school defined by one teacher as 'It became evident that we all had a concern about all the students in the school, their welfare and academic achievement, not just those in our own class.'

Consideration of the ongoing need for school wide leadership means that teacher leadership is encouraged and supported. Parallel leadership provides links between administration and staff and between staff and classrooms. One teacher is specifically involved in a leadership training program. Teachers perceive that professional capacity has been enhanced and will continue to be enhanced through the quality of the professional conversations that now occur on a daily basis within the school. These quality conversations have also been implemented and practiced between the staff of the Broadmeadows amalgamating schools - an initiative of the MFN group.

### **sustaining phase**

#### **Teachers' views**

'There has been a total rethink of the way we do everything – what we do and how and why we do it, what our outcomes are and how will they be measured – all equating to improving our students, our philosophy, and our performance – this has been confronting for all staff but over time everyone seems to be able to put their personal feelings out of the whole picture and feel comfortable with the process.'

'Students have become self-reflective at all times. So if I have taught multiplication for three days and the student does not get it they have the responsibility to come and ask for help – they sign up for the *Help Group* in that area. The door to our room opens at 8 o'clock – there is an "Open for Business" sign on the door – students come in and work on projects or join a *Help Group*. Students know that they are in the room to go about the "business" of learning. Kids support each other in their learning successes by nominating one another for the *Throne of Commitment* - which is how we celebrate each others learning successes as they occur.'

'New families can upset the equilibrium for a while, but our students know how to respond and teach new kids what to do. They want our school to be a great place to come to. I now love doing playground duty in the 5/6 area – in fact sometimes it can be boring and you feel pleased when a ball goes over the fence just so you have something to do. Last week a teacher was away and the replacement did not realise

she had duty. I went out to relieve her and found no one there. I questioned the kids – only to be told ‘We’re looking after ourselves. We’re fine you don’t need to be here!’ The kids know our safety protocols whether for an injury or a fight (we haven’t had to use the fight protocols for a long time) because it is modelled at school from Prep up.’

‘With the amalgamation we are in a kind of limbo space in a way. However we need to make sure that what we have developed permeates the school. People are encouraged to keep reflecting, thinking and developing, especially around our schoolwide pedagogy – that’s the key to changing things for our kids. I need to model for younger teachers – that’s sustainability - developing capacity in others. Through our PLTs we are sharing conversations about teaching, learning and assessment. Hopefully all the putting thinking into practice is happening in all the schools (that are merging).’

‘That’s something we’re really working on now - having assessment of learning, for learning ... the assessment process as part of the process of the teaching, learning, reflecting, planning (and) teaching cycle.’

‘We have working party teams... I lead the communications and culture team. The plan when we become one is to collate a giant size book with sections/chapters for each school to celebrate the significance of their past and what they see as their greatest achievements and then a section for the new stories which will unfold together.’

### **Researchers’ views**

The positive changes within the MFN school community have been dramatic. Clearly evident from both teacher comments and systemic data are the levels of improvements made in teacher morale, student academic achievement and well-being, student behaviour, community involvement, teacher professionalism and staff leadership capabilities. Students and their families are now actively involved in the learning process and see the importance of connecting learning to future and global

contexts. This school is now seen by all members of the school community as a safe place to be.

Teachers perceive that professional capacity has been enhanced and will continue to be enhanced through the quality of the professional conversations that now occur on a daily basis within the school. These quality conversations have also been implemented and practiced between the staff of the Broadmeadows amalgamating schools - an initiative of the MFN group.

Teachers believe in their knowledge of how to connect their teaching to student learning needs and display a level of discernment and confidence that will not be lost. The focus on student achievement as the central point of planning and decision making has created a sense of collective responsibility and alignment of practice that has seen the delivery of many outstanding improvements over the last 4 years.

The impending closure of the school has inspired the staff to embed success so that they can celebrate their achievements before the school closes. Teachers are committed to clarifying their strong pedagogical understandings and to embedding these into their practice. They are keen to use both the growth in their own teaching practice (intellectual capital) as well as the capacity to work together (social capital) to ensure successful amalgamation and a continued bright future for their students. Although there is a touch of sadness that they are losing their unique identity as Meadow Fair North their positive attitude to the future is an inspiration.

## **5. Summary**

The positive changes within the MFN school community during 2004-8 were dramatic. In 2004, the MFN community was considered to be 'fractured', a state compounded by poor relationships within the school and between the school and its community. Low staff morale, instances of violent student behaviour and disengagement with learning, resulting in poor academic results, had placed the school within the lowest rank of the education system's 'targeted' underachieving school group.

By 2008 MFN, in partnership with both parents and students, had become a 'dynamic' educationally-focused community. They had in place what they regarded as an inspirational vision and collectively embraced SWP which was being actioned in classrooms and evident in schoolwide processes, planning and professional learning provision. Clearly evident from both teachers' comments and systemic data are the levels of improvements achieved in teacher morale, student academic achievement and well-being, student behaviour, community involvement, teacher professionalism and staff leadership capabilities. By 2008, students and their families were actively involved in the learning process and saw the importance of connecting learning to future and global contexts.

The impending closure of the school inspired the staff to embed their successes so that they could celebrate their achievements before the school closed in 2009-10. Teachers indicated commitment to clarifying their strong pedagogical understandings and to embedding these into their practice. They were keen to use both the growth in their own teaching practice (intellectual capital) as well as the capacity to work together (social capital) to ensure successful amalgamation and a continued 'bright future' for their students.